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**TEACHER SELF-IDENTITY: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE LIVES OF  
TEACHERS AND THE INFLUENCES ON THEIR INTERACTIONS WITH  
STUDENTS**

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**June 2017**

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We hereby approve the dissertation of

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STUDENTS**

**HANNAH REID**

**ABSTRACT**

New teachers are supported extensively while participating in teacher training programs and during the first years of teaching. During this time, there are opportunities for the new teacher to explore their self-identity and determine how they will interact with students in the classroom. As teachers enter the later years of their careers and are considered experienced, they are forced to contend with changing political and societal factors that influence their experiences around teaching in the classroom, often times without the extensive support that is provided for the teachers in their first years. Through a lens of social constructivism, narrative inquiry was used to “story” the lives of four teachers in high schools around a Midwestern metropolitan area. The theoretical framework, constructed around theories of experience and self-identity formation, explored these teachers’ personal experience narratives and mapped their moral sources, traditions, and epistemological beliefs. The research found that the experiences teachers narrated were either stories of empowerment or stories of skepticism, and worked to influence the narrated self-identity and teacher/student interactions in both supportive and challenging ways.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*“Children, only animals live entirely in the Here and Now. Only nature knows neither memory nor history. But man – let me offer you a definition – is the storytelling animal. Wherever he goes he wants to leave behind not a chaotic wake, not an empty space, but the comforting marker – buoys and trails – signs of stories. He has to go on telling stories...As long as there’s a story, it’s all right.” (Swift, 1983, p. 63)*

Teaching is one of the most contentious and argued about professions today. For the past twenty years, teachers have been under constant scrutiny, with politicians weighing in and passing legislation on how teachers should be required to do their jobs. The 1990’s, and the passage of *No Child Left Behind* (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002), ushered in the era of accountability, with student performance on state achievement tests being used to measure effective teacher performance. Teachers, who once had autonomy in how to teach and what was taught in the classroom, now are required to follow strict state mandated standards that outline by grade level what should be taught. But how did the teaching profession get to this point?

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (Kena et al., 2014) graduation rates in America were on a steady rise, from 50.8% in the 1940’s to its greatest numbers in the 1970’s where 77.1% of students were graduating from four-year comprehensive high schools. Then, in the 1980’s graduation rates began to decline, and

by the beginning of the 1990's, the rate had decreased to 69.9%, which may be one reason that the government was prompted to step in and establish strict standards and accountability for teachers. By the 2010-2011 school year, graduation rates across the nation had again risen to 79%, suggesting that *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB, 2002), while not achieving its stated goal, maybe improved the quality of education for students and made graduation from four-year comprehensive highs schools much more attainable.

However, what of the quality of teacher performance? Urban schools, with traditionally low income, minority students, tended to perform significantly below national averages. In 2009, it was reported that while suburban cities had graduation rates of 80% and higher, most large urban centers had graduation rates that were below 50%, and in some cases, only 30% of students were graduating after four years (Swanson, 2009). While many things have been cited as the cause of this disparity, I had to wonder how much these statistics were influenced by the performance of teachers in these urban environments.

### **Personal Experience**

Twenty-five years ago, I was a new teacher, entering an urban school district with the idea that I was going to make a difference in the lives of the students I was going to teach. I had grown up in the suburbs with a certain amount of privilege, and I wanted to give these students some of the same advantages that had been afforded to me.

While working as a music teacher in that first job, I began working on a master's degree in technology education believing that the future of engagement with students would be around technology. I eventually worked as a building technology resource teacher and then as an instructional technology coach working with teachers district wide.

I then moved on to various roles in administration. Throughout all these experiences, I was constantly fascinated by the teacher/student interactions that I witnessed.

**Opera on tour.** I was fortunate during my first years of teaching in an urban environment to have an amazing, experienced administrator, and every idea I brought to her was received with a particular look and these special words, “Well, Miss Reid, try it out. See what happens. Keep me posted.” One day I walked into her office and informed her that the city’s opera company had an educational program called *Opera on Tour*, and that I had applied for and been awarded a grant so that members of the opera could and do a performance with the third, fourth and fifth graders in our school. We were going to perform the opera, *Carmen*. I can only imagine what ran through my principal’s head when I suggested this. I wanted to bring opera music to students in the inner city. Regardless of what she thought she stayed true to her stance of taking risks and said, “That sounds exciting, Miss Reid. Give it a try. See what happens. Keep me posted.”

Over the next several weeks, the third, fourth and fifth grade teachers had varying opinions about what I was planning on doing. Several thought I was taking on an ambitious task with no guarantee that it would matter to students or their families. These teachers did not hesitate in telling me everything that they felt was going to go wrong – from students hating what we were doing and not engaging in the process, to parents who would not come to the program because it was “opera” music. There was another group of teachers that thought I was wasting my time, but as long as I was not imposing any extra work on them, they did not care what I was doing. Then there were the three teachers who thought this was the best idea ever and were so excited to help our students have this experience. They spent hours helping me build the sets, make the costumes,

organize the rehearsals, and all the other little things that needed to be accomplished to have a successful performance. The night of the performance, students and parents were very excited about the successful performance, and through parent contributions and the building parent / teacher organization, we were able to continue the program for three more years.

**I hate this school.** It was several years later, after having moved into another district to become a technology resource teacher that I learned the program I was working in was going to be cut. I would be going back into the classroom to teach eighth grade English. About midway through that first year of being back in the classroom, one of the teachers from across the hallway, Mrs. Georges, came into my room extremely upset. Jonathan, a student known to challenge adults, who we had in our classes, had walked into her classroom that morning yelling. She stated that he looked at her and proceeded to tell her he hated the school, he hated her class, he hated all the students in her class, and most of all he hated her. Mrs. Georges was outraged, and stood in my room yelling at me about how she demanded an apology from him, and he refused. According to her, he responded, “Why should I apologize when what I said was true?” She had determined she was going to refer him to the principal for a ten-day suspension.

The whole time Mrs. Georges is telling me what had happened, I am thinking in the back of my mind, “He is twelve. This is his job. He is required to hate everything. That is what twelve year olds do.” My response to Jonathan would have been, “Wow, sorry you feel that way. Let me know if I can do anything to help. Now, have a seat, we have a lot we need to get done today.” and I would have moved on with the rest of the class. When I voiced what my response would have been to Mrs. Georges, she became



extremely angry with me, stating that would have allowed him to get away with bad behavior and that was unacceptable, and she stormed out of my room. I remember thinking after she left, “Why would I let a twelve-year-old set a negative tone and control how I proceeded through the rest of my day?” Mrs. Georges was so upset by what Jonathan had said, she wrote the referral and then for the next two weeks she retold the story to anyone who would listen. I was left wondering why she could not see this situation for what it was; a twelve-year-old boy acting like a twelve year old boy, who in that moment hated his school.

**Direction ball.** It was also during this time working as an English teacher that I was asked to help co-direct a project with a colleague. The idea was to give students digital cameras and ask them to take pictures that answered questions about the purposes, successes, and problems around attending school. The intent was to use the student pictures to teach the writing process, focusing on the idea of *voice* in writing. We worked with students on Saturday mornings at a local high school.

While most of the students were taking pictures of their friends, their textbooks, the school itself, and other obvious pictures of “school,” Henry was a eleventh grader who was taking pictures that were more subtle. One particular picture caught my interest, as it was a picture of a red ball in a black console. Around the ball were four yellow arrows, each pointing outwards, in a different direction like a compass. Henry called that picture, *Direction Ball*.

Henry was a very sociable, young, black teenager, who loved to talk and play around with his friends in the group. It was sometimes hard to get him to focus on the task at hand, and he was frequently caught playing games on the Internet, rather than

working on his writing. Four weeks into the program, I sat down next to him, and proceeded to instruct him on the writing process, to which he just smiled at me. I figured he was a struggling writer, as his avoidance of writing was strong and nothing had been written yet. We chose his picture *Direction Ball*. I implored Henry to start writing as he continued to smile at me. I told him I would support him any way I could through the whole process and prompted him to start by thinking of a good topic sentence – maybe one that answered which question he was focusing on with the picture. I told him I would be back to check on him in a few minutes. He smiled and said, “Okay.”

After working with another student for ten to fifteen minutes, I walked back to Henry. He was playing an Internet game so I asked him to show me his topic sentence. Henry smiled at me, flipped the screen on his computer towards me and pulled up a document. This is what was written on the screen.

*The picture to me represents things that get in my way of my success. My photo is called the direction ball. The picture is of a red ball with yellow arrows that are pointing north, south, east, and west. The red ball represents me and the yellow arrows are knowing which direction to go. They are unknown options on where to go in life. The blue and black part of the picture represents the world. The blue part of the picture signifies the sky and the black part represents nighttime: basically, a good and bad world. The red ball reflects my feeling on the world and it represents anger about not knowing which direction to go. The corner with red in the upper left represents the love in the world and that might be the direction I want to go in. Only time will tell which arrow I choose.*

It was written exactly like that – no grammar, spelling, or punctuation mistakes. I read through it and looked at Henry as he just smiled at me. I must have had a look of disbelief on my face because he looked at me and said defensively, “I wrote it.” His friend next to him said that he *had* just written it, and that Henry was “good like that.” He could write things quick. I felt embarrassed because here I was explaining the writing process to a student whom I assumed struggled with writing because he fit the stereotypical young, black male who sat in most of my classes. I learned that day not to assume anything about the students with whom I work; he led me in a new direction.

Later, reflecting on the project as a whole, and especially about Henry, I realized how much I had learned about the students I was working with and how what I had learned could help me teach students who were sitting in my classroom. I was excited to share my new understandings, so I showed the project to another English teacher with the hope that she would be interested in implementing the project with me in our school. After my explanation, the teacher looked at me and said what a “cute” project it was, and that she was not really interested in learning anything else about the students sitting in her classroom. She felt she already “knew enough about them.” Again, I was left wondering how I could see this project as such a positive learning experience for both the students and myself and another teacher see it as a “cute project.”

**Passion for Teaching.** It was during these experiences, and many more, that I learned the difference between those teachers that have a passion for what they did, and those who seemed to be just going through the motions. What made certain teachers give so willingly of their time and efforts to help provide positive experiences for the students they teach, when it seemed that others could not be bothered? What made certain teachers

be ardent advocates for the students that they taught, while others gave the perception of going through the motions and doing only what was required of them? I had no idea, but I knew that I wanted to be part of those teachers I had perceived as being passionate advocates for their students and who provided positive experiences.

Through the past 25 years, I have heard, seen, and experienced many stories that have elucidated the complex nature of the teacher/student relationship, and I am still fascinated by those same questions. What is in some teachers' personal identities and experiences that support the promoting and advocating of positive experiences for students, while others continually go through the motions with a sort of detachment? How could I obtain and examine those stories that teachers told about their experiences in teaching that created their self-identity as teachers, which then influenced the types of interactions that they had with students?

### **Thinking Narratively**

Nearly every person in America has attended school, whether it was public or private, at least through the early years of their childhood. Everyone has stories about certain teachers, traditions, and rites of passage that they had to go through in their educational experience. There are research articles that explain the impact that teachers can have, both positive and negative, during schooling, beyond the classroom environment and into adulthood (Hattie, 2012; Nushek, 2011; Rebora, 2012; Shearer, 2011). I remember several years ago a friend's brother was elected to the local school board of education where we grew up. When she called to tell me the news, she was laughing and said, "What qualifies him to be on the local school board? What does he know about schools, other than he went to one for twelve years?"

A former supervisor told me that the reason the profession of education will never change is because the people who become teachers are the people who did well in school, and therefore want to perpetuate the “idea” of school. They became teachers because they loved the process of learning, the organization of note taking, and the sequential order in which new meaning was made. How they learned best is how teachers approach pedagogy in their own classrooms. Despite the fact that the times have changed, many teachers feel we need to continue teaching the way we always have to make sure that students are prepared for the world the way that they were.

Telling stories is important to understanding the world that we live in. Stories give our lives meaning and build the understanding of the communities in which we interact on a daily basis (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). To better understand how experiences have shaped teacher self-identity and how that self-identity has influenced teacher/student interactions, I had to begin by reflecting on my own experiences in teaching and then determine what stories other teachers narrate that reveal how self-identity is shaped and how it influences teacher/student interaction.

### **Purpose of the Study**

In college programs across the country, preservice teachers are afforded the opportunity to explore the nature of their identity as teachers (Hamman, Gosselin, Romano & Bunuan, 2010; Knowles, 1994) and how their expectations of the classroom environment will influence their identity as a teacher (Farrell, 2006; Volkmann & Anderson, 1998). During the first few years of teaching, the new in-service teachers are watched closely by local education agencies, as well as state department of education programs that provide mentoring and monitoring of new teacher progress in the

classroom. However, it seems that after these few formative years of a teacher's career, discussion about identity and mentoring fade away, and the teacher is considered experienced. In one Midwestern state, teachers are required to take six college credit hours to renew certification, but these classes can be in any field, and cover any subject. Unless a district chooses to provide ongoing professional development supporting teacher self-identity and interactions with students, teachers are left on their own to determine how they want to interact with their students and what pedagogies with which they want to engage.

Recently this same Midwestern state increased the retirement requirements for teachers. Retirement payment is based on a calculation that includes the number of years of service and an average of the five highest years' salaries. For retirement in 2015, teachers had to have a minimum of 25 years of service and be at least 55 years old to get the largest percentage of benefits paid out by the retirement system. Over the next eight years, while there will be no age restriction for retirement, the number of years of service will increase to 35 years. With an increase in the number of years of service required for retirement, how do we support these teachers for the additional amount of time that they will be required to teach before receiving full retirement benefits from state systems?

The purpose of this study is to explore how experienced teachers, those who have taught for 18 years or more, formed their self-identity. In addition, the research will uncover how that self-identity influences teacher / student interaction. Adding to the conversations about the structures that disrupt and support self-identity can help lead to the designing of strategies that sustain teachers through the latter half of their careers to help alleviate frustration from a lack of support and increased work time.

## **Research Questions**

“Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This research will use narrative inquiry to explore the following research questions:

1. What do teachers narrate about their experiences of the classroom?
2. How might narrated classroom experiences have shaped a teacher’s self-identity?
  - a. What discontinuities or disjunctions in work trajectories are narrated in classroom experiences that support, complicate or contradict a teacher’s self-identity?
3. How might a teacher’s narrated self-identity influence his or her interactions with students?

Using narrative inquiry will allow me to use the stories as a way to process the current educational climate and how that is affecting teacher efficacy and interactions with students. The goal will be for me, the researcher, to be “thinking with stories, not just thinking about stories” (Clandinin, 2013).

## **Conclusion**

Mishler (1999), in his work with craft artists’ stated that the aim of his study was “to contribute to research and theory on the crafts as a form of creative work and to reflect on the general problem of relations between work and personal identity” (p. xiv). The aim of this study is to contribute to the research and theory on teachers’ self-identity formations, and the paths that teachers follow throughout their work experience. Exploring the work that they do in the classroom, as well as how political and societal

factors influence the educational climate as related to individual's self-identity will be explored through teacher narratives. The intent of this research is not to generalize, but to explore the stories of four teachers working in urban environments. "But man is the storytelling animal," said Tom Crick, the main character and a professor of history in Graham Swift's novel, *Waterland*. It is with a reliance on the idea that man is a storyteller that this research project will grow my understanding of how self-identity is formed, complicated, and contradicted through work trajectories, and how those self-identities influence the teacher/student interaction.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Today, many students are struggling in the classroom. They are disengaged with the educational process and are straining to understand curriculum in the current context that it is being taught. Many students in urban environments are disengaged with the educational process as evidenced by high drop out and failure rates. The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of the interaction between teacher and student through teacher self-reflection about his/her identity as a teacher. Self-reflection will give voice to teachers, and in the process, will lead to realizations on how his/her concept of self-identity affects interactions with students.

#### **The Psychology of Self**

In the book *When Teachers Face Themselves*, Jersild (1955) suggests that education should be about helping children know themselves and providing support in developing healthy attitudes of self-acceptance. However, in order for this to happen, “The teacher’s understanding and acceptance of himself is the most important requirement in any effort he makes to help students to know themselves and to gain healthy attitudes of self-acceptance” (p. 124). Teaching and learning does not happen in a vacuum. In today’s educational climate, a teacher is under tremendous pressure to

“prove” her worth by having students demonstrate what was learned on standardized tests. This pressure can influence how a teacher views her role in the classroom, how she views what students can and cannot do, and how she interacts with colleagues, peers and administration. These influences combined with a teacher’s past experiences impact her self-identity. Because of the social context of teaching, a teacher’s self-identity formation is greatly influenced by the social, political and cultural controls of the time.

Mead, writing in 1934, felt that until this time period, psychology had dealt with the self as being an independent and isolated entity. He believed, however, that the self could only be revealed through social context. The self was not present at birth; it could only emerge when an individual realized his relationship as part of the whole to others. To recognize and develop the self, language was essential, as the self was dependent on communication not only with one’s self, but also in the dialogue with others in the social context. The individual used the process of thinking to prepare to interact in social contexts, and these processes provided expression and reflection of the response for the individual. Mead believed to understand one’s self; one must understand the complete social process. The only way that the self could be revealed was through social facet.

Using Mead’s premise of the self, Gee (2000) defined the self as “being recognized as a certain kind of person in a given context,” reinforcing Mead’s idea that identity is revealed through social context. Gee believed that there were four ways to view identity: nature-identity, institution-identity, discourse-identity, and affinity-identity. The self developed in nature-identity from forces in which the power came from nature. Institution-identity looked to outside authorities to define the self, based on the positions self-occupied in society. Discourse-identity recognized the self, based on the

discourse or dialogue, of and with, rationale individuals, and affinity-identity defined the self, based on the experiences and shared practices of different groups.

As the self has been explored qualitatively, Akkerman and Miejer (2011) suggested that in pre-modern times, the self was defined by a greater cosmic whole, and that life was lived according to greater collective norms, suggesting the view of nature- and institution-identity. However, as the Age of Enlightenment and the scientific revolution emerged, truth was centered in the self, so origin and justification of the self came from within based on how the self was perceived in the world. With the advent of the post-modern world and globalization, man is seen as fragmented within multiple social worlds in which he engages, and the concept of self is driven by social interdependence and meaningful discourse that is constantly dynamic and continuously constructed, suggesting the discourse- and affinity-identity views. This shift in the views of how self is constructed leads into the thought that identity would be the ideal analytic lens in which to conduct research in education (Gee, 2000).

The educational climate that American teachers work in today has a strong tie to how political institutions define teacher work. The American political milieu forces on teachers an institutional identity through the actions of legislatures and politicians who seek to improve educational opportunities through state and federal mandates. These mandates can influence how much money a teacher makes, what pedagogies are used in the classroom, what content is taught, and how student assessment leads to teacher evaluation. Affinity groups, such as teacher unions and organizations, often provide push back to the current political mandates. For a teacher, this can cause conflict and uncertainty between the institution-identity and the affinity-identity when forming

individual self-identity. As a result, there has to be impact from these influences on how a teacher views his own self-identity. How much of self-identity is influenced by group affinity and political pressure needs to be determined.

### **Formation of Teacher Self-identity**

Albrecht and Fortney (2011) believed that the process of building or acquiring an identity was more telling than the actual identity itself. The process was determined to be intensely personal and identity was built around three frameworks: sameness (all group members share same characteristics), core of group (all group members share the same values and beliefs) and multiple discourses and relationships (representation of self comes with multiple identities depending on the situation and context at any given moment in time.) Research determined that identity formation was time sensitive and depended on stories that were set in the cultural and social setting that provided normative ways of acting or thinking so as to fit in with the group. For a teacher, this involves the use of boundary spaces: internal spaces (the space within the four walls of the classroom) and external spaces (the line of separation between the classroom and school). Because of this unique self within the institutional boundary, teachers should be utilized as participant researchers in educational research. The boundary spaces in which a teacher lives her professional life, shapes her beliefs and values about the educational process. There is a constant push-pull action between the pressures of teacher organizations, political mandates, and what is best for students. This constant conflict shapes how a teacher defines her self-identity.

Beijaard et al. (2004) completed a meta-analysis of research on the topic of teacher self-identity. Research projects were grouped into three different categories: those

that focused on the formation of teacher self-identity, those that identified the characteristics of teacher self-identity and those that used teacher personal stories to represent self-identity. While seemingly comprehensive in the scope of self-identity research, the researchers suggest that there is a gap in the literature around the influence that context plays during the formation of teacher self-identity.

Samuel and Stephens (2000), using a case study, explored the contextual factors of preservice teachers in post-apartheid South Africa, during the formation of their self-identity when doing field experiences in the classrooms. Researchers found that the students struggled to reconcile where they had come from and childhood experiences (the contextual factors), with the expectations of the teacher college when learning to become teachers. Samuel and Stephens realized these preservice teachers had “identity baggage,” and needed to understand the complex, sometimes complementary and often contradictory agendas experienced that influenced the development of a teacher identity. Teacher biographical experiences not critically reflected on by preservice students hindered the positive formation of teacher identity. In this case, critical reflection would have allowed for the creation of new experiences that provided better educational practices for students in the classroom.

Using teachers, Volkmann and Anderson (1996) explored teacher journals to determine how self-identity was developed. These researchers likened teacher identity to a lump of clay, and professional identity was shaped and formed by the context of daily work. Self-identity in this case was broken into three categories. The first category reflected the teacher’s feelings around still feeling like a student versus being the responsible adult and teacher in the room (student face versus adult face). The second

category (caring face versus tough face) reflected the teacher's conflict around showing students a caring side versus the expectation that she be tough to maintain classroom control. The third category focused on the teacher's feelings of incompetence, due to lack of experience, and the understanding that she was the teacher in the room, and as such, was considered the expert (content easy face versus content hard face). This conflict between what the teacher thought her identity should be and the expectations that the students and administration had of her, initiated a tension when trying to resolve her professional identity.

Alsup (2006) explored the experience of preservice teachers and the development of individual identity while working in student teaching situations. She believed that there were two societal forces that influenced how preservice teacher identity was created. First was the idea that society believes that education has failed the youth of today and the second was the binary way that teachers were depicted in news and media, either as a villain or hero. Like Volkmann and Anderson (1996), Alsup realized that preservice teachers were conflicted by many opposing forces that were found in experiences of student teaching. First, preservice teachers were conflicted between their identity of student and their identity of teacher, realizing that they are no longer students, but they also are not full-fledged teachers as of yet. Second, she found that preservice teachers had conflict around personal beliefs versus what was expected professionally as teachers. Finally, Alsup determined that preservice teachers' ways of thinking about teaching and learning that were learned in university classrooms were profoundly conflicted with the practical application of teaching and learning in classroom preservice experience. To help preservice teachers understand these conflicting forces, Alsup

created “borderland discourse,” a way of not only critically thinking, reflecting and analyzing preservice experiences, but dialoging about these experiences to make the thinking, reflecting and analyzing visible to other preservice teachers and university professors. Using this type of dialogue facilitated preservice teachers’ understanding of the conflict that arose in daily student teaching practices, which led to a deeper understanding of identity in the classroom as a preservice and new teacher. With all of the political and societal pressures around teachers and the educational climate in America today, the idea of “borderland discourse” would be beneficial to experienced teachers in understanding self-identity.

Hamman, Gosselin, Romano, and Bunuan (2010), explored the concept of future teacher self-identity with preservice teachers. Looking at the dimensions of possible selves during preservice training afforded preservice teachers the opportunity to envision how they would define themselves, to themselves and others. Possible selves theory was used to help the preservice teachers to understand their present identity and how that might fit with future actions. Preservice teachers were asked to project identity through time, while linking to emotions and contextual situations that exposed the multiple facets that were potential in the future. Research revealed that beginning teachers feared the possible selves that they might become. These fears were focused into four different categories: interpersonal relationships, classroom management, instruction, and professionalism. The researchers believed that taking an agential position on the future would help preservice teachers in avoiding or controlling negative possible selves.

Another key factor in the creation of teacher self-identity is how teachers view the profession of teaching. Farrell (2006) asked preservice teachers to use metaphors to

describe how the experience in the classroom is perceived. Participants referred to the classroom metaphorically as a battlefield, and their identity and role was to be the General on that battlefield. Research showed that how these preservice teachers viewed their role in the classroom affected the ability to effectively teach, and that preservice experiences had a more prevalent presence than any other training provided during the formation of professional self-identity.

Issues can arise in preservice teacher formation of professional identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). The self and its relationship to identity were determined both in and outside of the educational context. This created a challenge for preservice teachers when defining professional identity. The contexts and communities and how each influences teacher identity in teacher preparation programs revealed the relationship between emotions and identity and created a contradiction for preservice teachers between the stress of teaching and caring for students, which either expanded or limited teacher potential. Only through self-reflection on the part of the preservice teacher could this dichotomy be resolved and identity formation determined.

Self-identity formation in preservice teachers has been extensively researched. It is used as ways to help student teachers wanting to become practicing teachers visualize and learn what is necessary for success in the classroom. However, do these same types of identity formation apply to teachers who have been in the classroom for an extended period of time? The research is lacking on self-identity among experienced and veteran teachers. When a teacher's own personal beliefs and values about what is best for students in the educational classroom conflict with what political and societal institutions, local educational agencies, and teacher organizations espouse about what is best for



students, what happens to a teacher's self-identity? Is it possible for a teacher's self-identity to remain stable when assailed with conflicting ideas of who and what a teacher should be?

Akkerman and Meijer (2011), building off Beauchamp and Thomas's work (2009) determined that professional identity is both unitary and multiple, continuous and discontinuous, and individual and social. They determined that self-identity is a unitary idea and individual. Duplicity arises, however, when self-identity determined by an individual is also influenced by how others view that individual. As that individual moves through the multiple social worlds that make up daily living and working environments, this dichotomy deepens the individual's understanding of how individual self-identity is formed.

Coldron and Smith (1999) suggest that teacher identity formation is rooted in classroom practice of the teacher along with inherited moral sources. The lesson plans, activities planned, relationships with students, teachers and administration, responses to the guiding principles of the school, and view of moral propriety all influenced the formation of identity. Combined with these classroom practices are the developed patterns and sets of practices that teachers bring with them that establish the believed traditions of identity in relation to others. When teacher professional identity was formed, interaction with peers socially legitimized the identity, and successful formation allowed for the teacher to be participants in educational traditions, but also move forward towards unexplored ideas in teaching and learning. As the political and social climate applies increasing pressure to teachers, the sense of self could possibly erode and teacher identity loses legitimacy. It would seem to follow that this would hinder teachers in exploring

new ways of practicing the profession due to fear of being labeled or stigmatized as being an ineffective teacher by society standards.

Identity based on knowledge supports a categorical classification in the formation of teacher identity (Beijaard et al., 2000). It is observed that identity formation is ongoing process, with constant interpretation and reinterpretation as one experiences life. Beijaard, et al. classified teachers as experts in three distinct categories: subject matter expert, didactical expert, and pedagogical expert. The teacher who professionally identified with didactical subject matter expert based his profession on subject matter and skills. The teacher who identified with didactical experts based profession on knowledge and skills needed in planning execution and evaluation of teaching and learning processes. The teacher who professionally identified with pedagogical experts based profession on knowledge and skills needed to support students' social, emotional and moral development.

### **Dialogical Discourse and Personal Stories**

Teachers are often storytellers, and the stories told are stories about experiences in the classroom, stories about lesson plans that have gone wrong or right, and stories about students' reactions to teaching and learning. These stories rely on a common language and experience, shared by all of society: that of the experience of attending school. Through these stories, teachers appear to express their concerns, fears and joys of teaching and are shared in teachers' lounges and cafeterias, at social events, and with family and friends. These stories that teachers tell can become a window into helping understand how teachers self identify as teachers.

Gregg (2011) has recognized three different approaches researchers use to study self-identity. First, the idea that individuals have multiple identities, focuses on the shifting I-positions, reveals that there seems to be no “overarching identity” in the formation of self-identity and cites the work of Goffman (1959) and Bamberg (2004). The second approach where researchers seek out an overarching, psycho-social identity was used by researchers such as Erikson (1968). For these researchers, self-identity is created when memories are formed during adolescence and early adulthood, presenting a more stable or permanent identity. Gregg’s third approach situated self-identity within a fluid self. While identities are fairly stable based on the “big stories” about life histories and world views, self-concept fluctuated, depending on the “little stories” being told in the moment. Little stories may fade core beliefs to the background, “while in other moments, identities anchored in life-histories and core values may be brought ‘on line’ into the foreground” (p. 320).

The stories that teachers tell potentially change depending on which of these three approaches is used. Teachers hold multiple identities: they can be parents, children, community members, church members, etc., and what helped to form those identities are based on individual situations, past experiences, childhood memories, and any other number of things that are happening in the current political climate. These are the stories that need to be uncovered to understand teacher self-identity formation.

The Post Modern Era has brought about the idea that self-identity is formed around dialogic discourse. Bahktin (1981) determined that the main unit of meaning was the word, or “utterance.” It was this utterance that individuals used that was related to what he called “Otherness.” Otherness determined how words created a person’s

relationship with other people, other people's actions, which in turn created reactions and responses within the individual. Consequently, this created the dialogue that helped determine identity. All utterances, reactions and responses were dependent on temporal conditions and created in the individual multiple "I-positions." Often times these I-positions would conflict within the individual, creating tension within self-identity.

Hermans, Kempen, and van Loon (1992, 2012) furthered the idea of I-positions with the creation of dialogical self-theory. The two ideas of "self" and "dialogue" are combined, which created a "dynamic multiplicity of I-positions in the society of mind." (p. 8). The self has the ability to move spatially and temporally, positioning, counter positioning and repositioning as the dialogue is created within the "I." This dialogue within the self-created stories that about the self from an individual own point of view and experiences. It is through this inner dialogue that "a complex, multi-voiced, narratively structured self" (p.8) emerged.

Mishler (1999) used the idea of the dialogic self-theory to explore the lives of craftartists' identities. He theorized that identity was a collective term that referred to an individual's set of sub-identities. This idea of identity, which he called "lifetime work trajectories," explained the disjunctions and discontinuities around the individual's identity over the course of his life. Focusing on universality, continuity and coherence, Mishler sought to elucidate how life trajectory varied due to the crossing of different and conflicting forces, depending on the various stages of the craftartists' lives from childhood through adulthood. Mishler was able to document, through the use of qualitative, narrative research, the conflicting, autonomous identities that craftartists determine for themselves with identities created by others that are socially situated based

on the constructs of society. Through the telling of life stories by the craftartists, the contradicting forces of universality versus variability, continuity versus discontinuity and coherence versus contradictions was revealed during the creation of self-identity. As teachers mature in practice and experience in the classroom, autonomous identities do seem to emerge. Learning, how much of that identity is self-determined and how much is influenced by the constructs of society is difficult, as the demarcation between the two remains a blurred line.

Clandinin and Connelly (1996) examined the boundaries that surround teachers as they determine individual identity. The two main boundary areas that teachers participate in are the classroom and communal spaces that exist within the school outside of the four walls of the classroom. Clandinin and Connelly determined that schools had “sacred stories.” These were the stories that determined the official plan, policies, vision and mission of the school and were generally pushed down on teachers from others outside of the educational community who felt that they knew what is best for education (i.e. lawmakers, community board members). In communal spaces, teachers told “cover stories,” narratives that gave off individual teacher identity as experts of the sacred story. Teachers used these stories to demonstrate compliance with the practices that were pushed down on their individual practice and identities. However, within the four walls of the classroom, Clandinin and Connelly found that there were “secret stories.” These stories were the lived stories that teachers told to other teachers about individual experiences in the classroom, without regard to whether or not they complied with the sacred story of the district.

In the late summer of 2015, shortly before school started for the year, it seemed that the political climate in America turned against teachers. One presidential candidate said in an interview (Layton, 2015), “I want to punch teachers’ unions in the face. They have done more to ruin education in America and have hurt America’s children.” Another candidate was quoted as saying, “If I were not president, but if I were King of America, I would abolish all teachers’ lounges, where they sit together and worry about ‘woe is us’” (LoBianco, 2015). Yet at the same time, as school began, social media was filled with parent postings supporting teachers in the classroom, and television stations highlighted positive stories about students starting the first day of school, and teachers welcoming students to the new year. This dichotomy is highlighted in Goldstein’s (2014) book, *Teacher Wars*. Barkan (2015), in review of the book wrote, “The ed reformers’ stance looks like a Madonna-whore complex: teachers are miracle-working saviors of poor and downtrodden children, or they are villains preventing these children from benefitting from a good education.” Do these viewpoints cause confusion to both teachers and the communities in which they work? What about for the kids sitting in the classroom? How does this duality of teacher as villain or hero influence the narrative of a teacher’s self-identity?

### **Generativity**

While the research previously mentioned focuses on the cultural, political, social and temporal factors that influence and make-up teacher self-identity, there is another body of research that focuses on self-identity being innate, and part of an individual’s development while progressing through life. Erikson (1950) wrote of seven psychosocial stages of development that ranged from childhood through adulthood. Around the age of

40-65, according to Erikson, adults entered the seventh stage: generativity versus stagnation. This stage of development followed the intimacy versus isolation stage (the period of building lasting relationships) and focused on adults determining how they could contribute to the world and future generations. Generativity was defined by the adult's need to give and guide the next generation, commit to others beyond oneself and was realized through the raising of children or other family members, or mentoring coworkers. With generativity, adults strive to nurture elements and ideals in people and places that will outlast individual life spans. Adult stagnation resulted in self comfort and security being more important than the challenge and sacrifice to help others, and demonstrated self-centered, self-indulgent and self-absorbed behaviors. In stagnation, adults had a lack of concern for young people and had no interest in work satisfaction or self-improvement. These adults often felt disconnected with and uninvolved in community, society and family relationships.

Jones and McAdams (2013) researched whether or not highly generative individuals see themselves being that way because of family, teacher, mentor or societal interactions. Using life narrative methodology, it was determined that generativity, as defined by Erikson, was positively associated with recalling positive socializing experiences from family members, teachers and mentors. In addition, participants reported receiving high amounts of support, caring and engagement from one of these entities early on in life. However, the researchers cautioned that it is difficult to determine if results were a product of certain psychological characteristics within individuals, or based on interaction with adults and institutions when younger.

The breakdown in the data suggests that for African Americans, socio economic status played a role in generativity being positively associated with mentors, teachers and family, while for European whites, socio economic status had no impact. For men, institutions were stronger predictors of generativity, and for women, family was a stronger predictor of generativity. For all participants, the higher the generativity the more likely the participant was engaged in civic, political and religious institutions (Jones & McAdams, 2013).

Tonnsen, Alexander, Topolka-Jorissen and Jacobs (2011) determined, based on each other's individual life stories, that generative individuals must have early life experiences with achievement, affiliation and power. Achievement referred to the ability to meet or exceed standards set by others based on performance or set internal standards determined personally. Affiliation was the need individuals had to have a positive, affective relationship with others, including coworkers, subordinates, students and family members. Power was an individual's need to have influence over and control of other people in the individual's sphere of influence. It was determined that early life experiences created generative adults and that these experiences had a reciprocal relationship to each other. For these four researchers as participants, high accomplishment early on in life led to a feeling of empowerment. The feeling of empowerment led to more achievement, which led to the confidence to build relationships and influence others within their spheres. The researchers feel that this is what contributed to each person's high generative characteristics in midlife, as university professors for a teacher education program.



Slater's (2003) research revealed that a sense of generativity was important to both individuals and society. For individuals in families, this meant that the well-being of the children in future generations was established, and for those in organizations it was about caring for the mission of the institution and its employees. The idea of "self-actualization" was critical and individuals worked hard at something believed to be worthwhile and important. Slater realized that because identity is formed at the intersection of the individual, institution and society, studies about generativity needed to focus on this juncture where the three categories met. To gain a better understanding of what is happening at this intersection, Slater suggested several techniques for future research on generativity. First, it is suggested that longitudinal studies will help develop an understanding of how generativity develops over time and influences that are critical to the formation of generativity. Next, cross-cultural studies were recommended to help understand the impact of culture on generativity. Finally, Slater suggests taking a humanities approach to generativity, and using literature to elucidate the conflict of generativity versus stagnation. Once there is understanding, a connection can then be made to history to help gain deeper understanding of the concept.

**Teacher generativity.** In the application of generativity to teacher's lives, researchers identified three major themes that supported the idea of a generative teacher (Giles, Smythe, & Spencer, 2012). First, teachers were "always in relationship." The teacher/student interaction was always engaged, connected and respectful of each other when the teacher was generative. The relationship between teacher and student extended beyond the classroom, and even when conflict arose between teacher and student, the outcome was generally positive for the students and the relationship remained stable.

Second, the idea of “comportment” was important to a teacher being generative. How the teacher and student behaved towards each other was reflective of the teacher’s “mode of being,” how they were in the world. Giles et al. determined that how the teacher behaved influenced how the student behaved. Teacher respect garnered student respect, while teacher disrespect (even through joking sarcasm) resulted in negativity from students. Third, the researchers determined that the action between student and teacher was always “in the play.” Teachers and students were always interacting within different situations, and that the lived experiences of these interactions were unpredictable. Therefore, the generative teacher related those situations to teachable moments, and used the unexpected to help students connect to real world situations. The concluding idea of the research was that in order to ensure generativity on the part of teachers, the building and nurturing of the heart of the educational experience, the teacher/student relationship, mattered the most and was the most critical.

In applying the idea of generativity to teachers’ lived lives, Fairbanks et al. (2010) determined that there are four characteristics that determined why a teacher might be more thoughtfully adaptive than another. First, a teacher’s beliefs and personal practice theories were formed around epistemological beliefs of the teacher. These explicitly stated beliefs were influenced by family background, personal schooling experiences as a child, experiences as a preservice teacher in education programs, and current experience, and are intertwined with the knowledge a teacher carries in the current working educational environment. Second, teachers who were more adaptive had a strong vision, and sought outcomes for students that were beyond the curricular goals. These outcomes were morally based and were designed to inspire children based on the personal beliefs of

the teacher. Third, thoughtfully adaptive teachers had a strong sense of belonging within the physical spaces in which they worked and lived. This included the actual classroom and school, as well as the community where teaching occurred. Fairbanks, et al. found that tension was often created in the school and community that challenged a teacher's individual ideals and educational contexts; however, teachers who successfully navigated that tension were more thoughtfully adaptive. Fourth, more thoughtfully adaptive teachers had a strong identity that was shaped by cultural contexts and personal beliefs. These teachers believed that the art of teaching was more than just a learned technical skill, and were able to imagine worlds for students that did not yet exist. As a result of these characteristics, the more thoughtfully adaptive teachers were able to demonstrate a stronger sense of generativity to students than those teachers that were missing one or more of these characteristics.

Matsumura, Slater, and Crosson (2008) determined that teachers are powerful models for students and that affective behaviors of the teacher were just as important as the academics that were taught. Research revealed that there was importance in the teacher considering the social experience of students in the classroom, the role that emotion plays in cognition, and clear rules for prosocial behavior explicitly stated in teacher expectations for students in the classroom.

Hanley (2006) suggested that the classroom was a place where transmission of knowledge laid the groundwork for the transformation of students. It was a site of agency and power. It was also suggested that education should be a means for students to think more critically about the world and partake of the "grand adventure" that is democracy. However, Hanley found that teachers lacked the training to use critical consciousness to

examine individual perspectives about the world and to learn from students. As a result, an environment that the author felt should be a place to think and create became an environment of alienation. Teachers who were unaware of how to use critical consciousness with students were oblivious to the hidden curriculum, used drills and tests as the ultimate meaning of what the student knew, provided teaching and learning that was unidirectional, and searched to control students to avoid ambiguous and uncomfortable situations.

## **Conclusion**

Understanding how self-identity is formed in mid-career teachers of urban students will be critical to this current research project. As reviewed in the literature, the social context in which teachers work creates tension between the personal values and beliefs of teachers, and the expectations that society pushes down on teachers. In addition, there needs to be an understanding of the different boundaries, such as the classroom, school and community environments that teachers interact in and what pedagogical and content knowledge and skills teachers believe are essential to educate students.

The way to gain this understanding about teachers, as suggested by the literature, is to use dialogical discourse to understand teacher identity. Because of the previously stated factors, identity of teachers is constantly shifting and evolving, given the current contexts in which they are working. Using the dialogic approach will help to elucidate teachers' beliefs about their identities and will help determine the trajectories of those identities over time (Mishler, 1999).

To help provide understanding of the multiple tensions and shifts in teacher work identity, Ackermann and Meijer's (2011) definition for teacher identity will be relied on to provide guidance. Recognizing the dichotomy of the dialogical approach, these researchers suggest defining teacher identity as "an ongoing process of negotiating and interrelating multiple I-positions in such ways that a more or less coherent and consistent sense of the self is maintained throughout various participations and self-investments in one's (working) life."

Research around generativity within adults suggests that wanting to make the world a better place for future generations would lend itself to the teaching profession. If, as the research suggests, the teacher is the most influential factor within the four walls of the classroom on student behaviors and achievement (Hattie, 2012), gaining a deeper understanding of self-identity in conjunction with teacher views on generativity may reveal the assets and difficulties of teachers' interactions with students in today's current educational climate and contexts.

### **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This research stemmed from perceived disengagement and disillusionment of urban youth with the educational environment (Frank, 1998). Just as the students are disillusioned, veteran teachers of twenty years or more are also becoming frustrated and disheartened as they are forced to contend with greater pressure from outside the educational field, such as public opinion and governmental policy. An exploration of how those forces, both from within the system and without, influenced teacher perception of his/her own self-identity and an exploration of how that self-identity influenced his/her interactions with students in the classroom was necessary. Creswell (2013) defined qualitative research as the assumptions and theoretical frameworks that informed a study of a particular research problem. The in-depth study of this problem required the emic perspective, where the research was framed within the context of teachers' lived experiences (Horvat, 2013).

Student and teacher interactions are critical in influencing student attitudes and assumptions about schooling (Giles, Smythe & Spencer, 2012). To illuminate these interactions, an exploration of the lived experiences that teachers had, and their perceptions of reality as it relates to the nature of interaction with students in the

classroom was accomplished through qualitative research. When problems are presented in education, “We either assume we understand the problem and devise a solution, or we do not bother to try to understand the problem in all of its complexity in a social context before designing a solution” (Horvat, 2013). Deductive and inductive analysis, reflexivity on the part of the researcher, and the uncovering of complex descriptions to interpret meaning of the problem exposed emerging themes and patterns around the research questions. It was through this close study of the nature of the interaction between teacher and student that meaningful contributions to the literature of this topic were augmented. This process was accomplished through a qualitative approach to the research problem.

### **Thinking as a Narrative Inquirer**

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative method that is about examining stories to understand how they weave together to create a larger historical context (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). It is these stories that give the world meaning and build the lives and communities of those striving to understand the realities of life. Stories enable individuals to explore experience as phenomenon (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). For narrative inquirers, it is a way of understanding experience (Clandinin, 2013). The guiding principal of how individuals study culture relies on the researcher understanding that he is a practitioner, striving to understand and make meaning of the stories that humans tell, rather than a theorist in search of the laws of science. Geertz (1973) explains that “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (p. 5). This research project aimed to explore the “webs of significance” that teachers spun about themselves and the

perceptions that they had to the stories that others spun about their lived lives. As the researcher, I took on the role of cultural interpreter, and as such understood that there are no conclusions to be drawn here and reported. It was my role to augment the discussions around current teacher self-identity and interactions with students.

To uncover these “webs of significance” a narrative inquirer uses stories of lived experiences – narratives. While understanding that narrative means different things to different disciplines, Riessman (2008) suggests that the concept of narrative should be viewed on a continuum. She writes, “On one end of the continuum of applications lies the very restrictive definition of social linguistics” (p. 5). Here, the narrative inquirer asks participants one short question, centered topically and temporally. “On the other end of the continuum...narrative can refer to an entire lived story, woven from threads of interviews, observations, and documents” (p. 5). Riessman goes on to suggest that the work of sociology and psychology lie in the middle of the continuum, and tells “extended accounts of lives in context that develop over the course of a single or multiple research interview” (p. 6). As the narrative inquirer, I collected these “extended accounts” as part of the interview process, where teachers were asked to frame their professional lives through experiences in interacting with other teachers, administrators, students, families and schools.

For Clandinin (2013) the fundamentals of narrative inquiry include the idea of experience being relational, continuous and social. First, the ontology of narrative inquiry calls for a continual exploration of experience as individuals seek to categorize, group and create a hierarchy based on relational experiences’ similarities and differences. At the same time, it is understood that experience is a “narratively composed phenomenon,”



with continuity between the imagined past and imagined now influencing the imagined future. Second, based on Dewey's *Theory of Experience*, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) posit that it is "the notion that experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences. Wherever one positions oneself in that continuum – the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future – each point has a past experiential base and leads to an experiential future" (p. 2). Finally the third fundamental of narrative inquiry is the idea of experience being social. The stories that people tell are influenced by the social interactions of those around them, the institutions in which they work and the communities in which they live.

The challenge for researchers using experience with narrative inquiry is "how to put knowledge in the service of enhancing human experience" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). With the belief that using Dewey's (1938) *Theory of Experience* creates an ontology that is transactional (generating a relationship between the human being and her environment) rather than transcendental (conditioning human knowledge based on a priori experience), Clandinin and Rosiek believe that epistemology of experience is that it gives people insight into the world and their lives and helps to create a "new relation" with the world that is more significant and less imposed. To get at the core of these experiences, narrative inquiry researchers will make a conscientious choice to explore certain aspects of an experience, and will study it for its consequences on communities and the individuals that live within those environments, all the while taking into account the social influences that impact the individual's life and telling of those experiences.

Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) identified four themes that emerged as researchers moved towards the idea of narrative inquiry. These four themes were: the relationship

between the researcher and the researched, the move from data as numbers to words, turning from the general to the particular, and the idea of “blurring knowing.” In the relationship between the researcher and the researched, there is move from relational distance through objectivity to relational closeness and interpretation and a focus on understanding the meaning behind phenomena. There is an understanding that a relationship will develop and be nurtured through the research process. With the usage of data, there is question as to whether numbers can really represent human interaction and experience. In moving from the general to the particular, narrative inquiry researchers strive to understand the significance of particular human experiences in particular setting with the realization that understanding specific experience is just as important as being able to generalize. Finally, blurring the knowing is a means to understand that there is no one right or wrong answer with this methodology, but that “narrative inquiry allows wondering, tentativeness, and alternative views to exist as part of the research account.”

As a narrative researcher, it is important to remember that the stories shared by participants are the stories of their lived experiences (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). “Narrative inquirers frequently find themselves crossing cultural discourses, ideologies, and institutional boundaries. In this work they often encounter both deep similarities and profound differences between their own experience and those with whom they work, neither of which can be reduced to the other” (p. 59). As the narrative inquirer moves through these stories, she will find points of connection and disconnect between the researcher and the participant, and must be cognizant of these intersections and dissonances.

Coles, (1998) working with Dr. William Carlos Williams, a mentor in his internship program, learned the importance of listening to the human accumulation of stories needing to be told and heard. Stories became a new way to help patients, rather than using theory to diagnose and categorize into specific illnesses or conditions. Dr. Williams suggested to Coles that stories were a result of the lives that people lived, and that to be a compassionate human it was important to respect the other's stories and learn from them. Coles wrote:

Such a respect for narrative as everyone's rock-bottom capacity, but also as the universal gift, to be shared with others, seemed altogether fitting. I tried to keep in mind what I heard. I would remember it later as I began meeting children who had to fight their way past mobs to obtain a desegregated education. They, too, knew pain, and had "problems"; they, too, possessed "psychodynamics"; but they were also accumulating stories on their journey, as the New Jersey doctor [Dr. Williams], close to the end of his, had put it, and the stories were ones that begged to be told (p. 30).

Teachers who have taught for any length of time have "accumulated stories on their journey" and as Coles' writes, those stories are "ones that are begged to be told." The foundation for this research was revealed through those stories of the lived experience that teachers told. It used words to make the meaning of *those* words, data through which similarities and differences were uncovered, and became the "narrative inquiry landscape" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007) through which teacher self-identity was revealed along with the influence that identity had on teacher/student interactions.

Mishler's (1999) use of narrative inquiry as a methodology allowed him to explore what motivated and sustained craftartists' work trajectories as their identities were formed and shaped over time. He used what he called a "critical analytic perspective," the idea that through his interviews, he needed to uncover the way that craftartists saw themselves individually, as well as how they saw themselves represented within the larger social and cultural milieu (p. 50). This same critical analytic perspective was used in this research to explore what motivates and sustains teachers in today's classrooms.

The review of the literature revealed that the current educational system lacked a concentrated effort for supporting teachers in their work, especially those teachers that are further along in the career trajectory. It is these teachers that are often left to their own devices as being "experienced" teachers, and not in need of such supports. But it is often these teachers that struggle with burnout and disengagement with the students that they teach. This research sought to use narrative inquiry methodology to provide a view into the wonderings of teacher behavior: why teachers behave with students the way that they do, and how teacher/student interaction can best be supported in an urban environment to help engage both the teacher and student in the educational process.

### **Research Questions**

Narrative inquiry gives the world meaning by helping people make connections and build lives and community (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Building upon this premise, this research endeavored to make meaning around the lives of teachers working in the urban, public educational system of today. This narrative inquiry approach took the stories around experiences that teachers told and explored those experiences as

phenomena. Utilizing narrative inquiry to investigate the shared stories of teachers gave context to the experience of teaching, and lead to a greater understanding of the world in which teachers worked and lived (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). To accomplish this task this research was focused on the following research questions:

1. What do teachers narrate about their experiences of the classroom?
2. How might narrated classroom experiences have shaped a teacher's self-identity?
  - a. What discontinuities or disjunctions in work trajectories are narrated in classroom experiences that support, complicate or contradict a teacher's self-identity?
3. How might a teacher's narrated self-identity influence his or her interactions with students?

The distinct, veteran group of teachers participating in this narrative inquiry research did not have the traditional support system that was in place for the novice teacher, so the experiences that these teachers narrated about the classroom was a way to bring out who these teachers were, focusing on their moral traditions and epistemological beliefs. The narrative inquiry researcher used the stories teachers tell to tease apart how this cohort of teachers saw themselves in regards to self-identity and teacher/student interaction.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this research was grounded in the work of Dewey's *Theory of Experience* (1938) as was mapped by Rosiek and Cladindin (2007) in their understanding of the narrative inquiry landscape, and Mishler's (1999) idea of identity used in research in understanding craftartists' narratives.

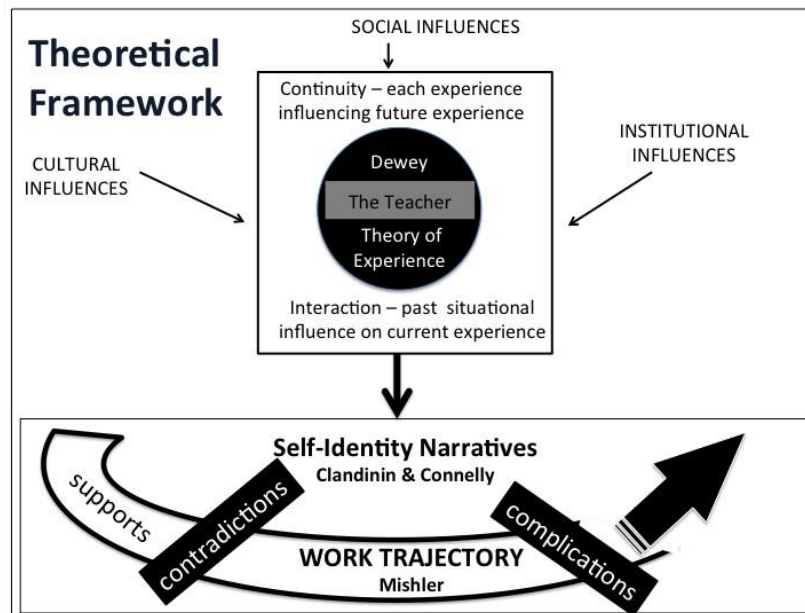
Dewey addresses the nature of human experience by focusing on two principles, continuity and interaction. Each experience that a person has will influence his or her future experience, creating continuity between past, present and future experiences. The current experiences are influenced by the social context in which they are occurring. As these current experiences are happening, past experience affects the interaction in the present situation. This cycle of continuity remains as the present situation creates new meaning that will influence future interactions and experiences.

Rosiek and Clandinin's position that Dewey supports an ontology of experience that is transactional (2007) corresponds well with the exploration of teacher lives. There is an understanding on the narrative inquirers part that the teacher's role in the experience is an integral part of that experience, and that the exploration of the experience is not just about the experience itself. This narrative inquiry explored the relationship between the teacher and the experiences in which she interacted within the environment to help create an understanding of what is happening with that interaction to reduce anxiety and stress for future interactions and experiences. Relationships are created between a teacher and the environment in which he/she interacts and careful, and thorough critical analysis on the part of the narrative inquirer reveals these relationships that foster the creation of new experiences that then become part of future experience. The social influences on a person's life emphasize the influence of the environment on the stories that a person includes in his or her unique personal history. Narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007) is a "valorizing of individuals' experiences" and "an exploration of the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted." Working within this theoretical framework

was critical for understanding the work of teachers in today's social, cultural and political climate.

Mishler (1999) refers to adult identity as a collective term incorporating the multiple sub-identities that adults live out, how those identities are formed and the significance of the disjunctions and discontinuities that arise in the life trajectories of the work identity. For Mishler's work, the central problem of craftartists' identity was how that identity was "shaped and achieved over time – the trajectories of identity formation." Building on Erikson's (1950) work of ego identity, Mishler created a framework for analysis of how craftartists arrived at their own current work identities. Through the narratives of craftartists, Mishler explored the stories told that revealed the continuity and discontinuity of life trajectories, and how this influenced the way the craftartists' work trajectories progressed to current situational experiences at the time that the narratives were explored.

Dewey's, Rosiek and Clandinin's, and Mishler's ideas were used in this research to map out the theoretical framework, providing the opportunity for a deeper understanding of the professional lives of teachers (see Figure 1). This research explored teacher narratives for how past experiences influenced current experience, and how continuity and discontinuity in personal and professional lives disrupted work trajectories. The research then explored how those disruptions within the work trajectory influenced interaction with students with whom teachers had come in to contact with over their teaching experiences.



**Figure 1.** Theoretical Framework.

## Conceptual Framework

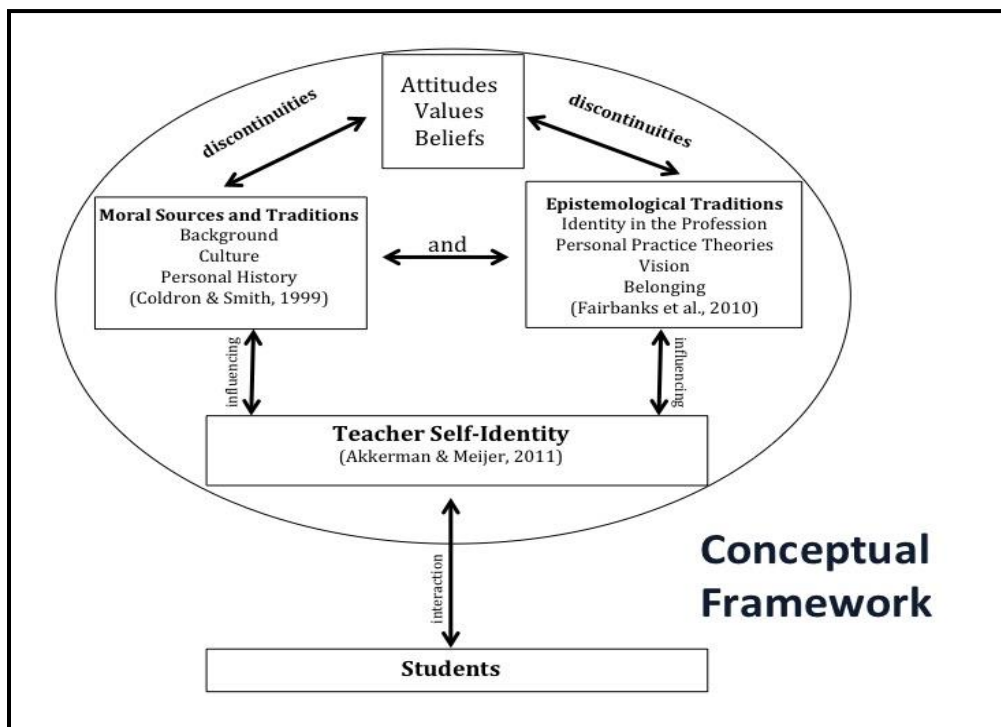
To help elicit the teacher narratives on experiences that lead to continuity and discontinuity of their work trajectory, this research focused on two aspects of self-identity. The first interview followed the research of Coldron and Smith (1999), and focused on an individual's moral sources and traditions which were partly given by those with whom individuals came into contact and were partially determined by the context, or social spaces an individual inhabited. Some of these traditions were given to individuals through experiences and some were inherited through an individual's personal histories. As teachers, these moral sources and traditions influenced perspective around self-identity.

These perspectives can be broken down into four categories: beliefs and personal practical theories, vision, belonging, and identity (Fairbanks, et al., 2010). Beliefs and personal practical theories seek to understand how practical teaching knowledge on the



teacher's part influences the teacher's behavior. Vision is the commitment that a teacher may have fostering outcomes with students that reach beyond the traditional mandated curriculum. Belonging refers to the situational value systems that influence a teacher's sense of belonging, and identity is how a teacher views the sociocultural ideas about the contextual influences around teacher self-identity.

Eliciting teacher narratives on the moral and epistemological traditions focused this research on uncovering the discontinuities that teachers have experienced in their professional lives that have changed how they view themselves, other teachers, and the students that they work with in their classrooms (Hamman, Romano & Bunuan, 2010). As self-identity is generally fluid, and depends on temporal and situational experiences, reducing these narratives will help augment the understanding of teacher self-identity and its relationship to student interaction (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Conceptual Framework. This framework was used to determine a priori and NVivo coding.

## **Researcher Stance**

Student disengagement with the educational process is a large problem for urban districts (Labaree, 2010). What role does the interaction between teachers and students play in that disengagement, and the way in which the teacher's self-identity influence how teachers interact with students? My positionality within the research topic was that of an urban educator who had been working in the field for over twenty-five years. I had worked in the urban environment as a teacher, instructional coach, building administrator and central office administrator. During that time, I had worked with different teachers, both male and female, and of different races, who had brought questions to mind about my understanding of the role of a teacher in the classroom, as well as the role played when interacting with students, especially in mid-career teachers.

In qualitative research, the researcher is the key instrument (Creswell, 2013). The researcher herself collects the data through the interview questions she created, codes the data and determines the interactions. She does not use questions or instruments that had been developed by other researchers. Because of this, I had to always be attentive to exploring all the different ways that the ethics of the research and the trustworthiness of the interpretation may have been compromised (Galletta, 2013). Reflexivity played a key role in achieving this attentiveness.

A researcher's ability to put aside her own subjectivity in order to achieve unbiased receptiveness of participants' stories is crucial the qualitative research process (Moustakas, 1994). For the past 20 years I have kept journals of experiences that have created questions and wonderings around observations of the educational environment, as well as both positive and negative experiences in my own teaching and learning.

*Sample Journal Entry:* “September 13, 2008 – Met the new principal today at City Elementary School... While we were sitting in her office talking, a teacher marched a child in demanding that a child be suspended. The teacher was extremely upset, and the child was crying. I told [the principal] that I would start walking around the school on my own while she dealt with the situation, and that I would check back in with her later. As I was walking around the school, I walked into the room of the teacher who had brought the student down to the principal’s office. Without prompting, Mrs. Taylor introduced herself and apologized to me for interrupting our meeting, but stated the child needed to be dealt with immediately. Apparently the child had been caught stealing items off her desk... I checked back in with the principal before I left to talk... about where we were going to place the new iPad cart once it came. I asked her if she was concerned with theft at all. She asked me if my question was prompted by the teacher who had brought the student in to be suspended. I responded that I was asking all the elementary principals that question to be sure we had a plan in place for security of the cart... The principal responded that she was not worried about the security of the cart and then proceeded to tell me the story of this child. This was the third time this child had been caught stealing in the classroom. He had been caught stealing a granola bar, a bag of fruit snacks, and a banana out of child’s lunch. The principal said that when she asked the child why he was stealing, he responded that he was hungry. Why would the teacher not ask the child that question? If all the child is taking is food, couldn’t the teacher determine that he was hungry? Why the need to punish and berate the child and

make an example of him in front of the whole class? Why do teachers like this have to be on such a power trip? I don't get it..."

*Sample Journal Entry:* "March 13, 2014 - Working in an urban environment for the past 20 years, I have often seen interactions between teachers and students that have puzzled me. Watching a teacher berate a six year old on the second day of school for not hanging a book bag up in the correct place, or a high school teacher announcing after the release of state test scores "I taught the material. It's not my problem they didn't understand it," - all of these incidences raised questions. Why do some teachers demonstrate compassion and understanding about students in urban classrooms, and some don't?"

Throughout the past 20 years, I have continually written about these experiences, while keeping record of interactions that bothered me and tried to explain what I thought was happening, especially as I moved into administrative roles, both at the principal level and central office level. These situations that I have recorded seem to involve all teachers, regardless of race or gender. To be an effective narrative inquirer, it was critical for me to be aware of my personal biases about teacher behavior and how that potentially could influence how I hears and experienced teacher narratives.

"Narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Mishler's (1999) interest in the lives of craftartists came out of his own interest in and love of the work that artists did of the Arts and Crafts Period in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Mishler was fascinated by the likes of William Morris, who focused on art in beauty in a time when capitalism and industry were on the rise with the Industrial Revolution and the world that was increasingly fascinated with mechanical technologies.

Like Mishler's love of art, the idea for this research came out of a love for education and teaching children, and a sincere belief that despite the current political climate in education of testing and accountability and the multiple social, environmental and economic factors influencing urban student success, teachers were still the single most important influence on the educational process (Hattie, 2009).

Within the epistemological perspectives of narrative inquiry, the determination of researcher stance in this particular research project was methodologically blurred. While the post-positivist stance could be ruled out for its emphasis on objectivity and researcher prediction and control (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011) it was harder to discern between the constructivist and critical paradigms. In the constructivist paradigm, the researcher is much closer to the narrator telling of the stories and experiences, although still maintains control over the semi-structured interviews, observations, and open-ended analyses. Within constructivism, participants are selected based on those who reflect the theoretical framework, and the power is shared between researcher and narrator. Critical paradigm considers the researcher in the design of the research, where the power tensions are made explicit. There is a critical analysis by both the researcher and the narrator to understand how stories are situated in current time with both historical and political relationships (Hollingsworth and Dybdahl, 2007). This research design supported epistemological traits of both these paradigms.

For this narrative inquiry, the social constructivist approach was used, and there was a co-construction of meaning based on experience similarities and differences between the researcher and the teacher participant. Co-construction ensured that the data reflected the meaning of the participant in regards to the stories narrated; however the

researcher potentially complicated the participant's experience through interpretive iterations. For this reason, the constructed paradigm had more import over the researcher stance than the critical paradigm. As qualitative research is a highly iterative process, it was important to keep in mind that while starting with the idea of a constructivist paradigm, there were times when there was strong inclination towards the critical paradigm, attending to the historical and political context in which the narrative is situated, and depending on where in the career trajectory teacher participants place themselves and the experiences being described (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007).

### **Participants**

This research used purposeful sampling to find individuals who were willing to share their lived experiences in the field of teaching in Midwest, urban high schools. Creswell (2013) recommends that, "In a narrative study, one needs to find one or more individuals to study, individuals who are accessible, willing to provide information, and distinctive for their accomplishments and ordinariness or who shed light on a specific phenomenon or issue being explored" (p. 147). Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest that sampling requires the researcher to think about "inclusion and exclusion criteria" when selecting participants. It is a matter of determining who should be heard and what needs to be heard in order to successfully answer the research questions. To participate in this study, teachers had to have a minimum of 18 years teaching experience. Based on a 35-year career (the number of years to be eligible for retirement benefits) this would be half way through these teachers' careers. "Purposeful" (Marshall and Rossman, 2011) sampling helped in identifying participants of interest from the participant who knew others that had a rich amount of information to add to the study.

Creswell (2013) suggests that in narrative research, a sample size should consist of one or two participants, unless the researcher is trying to create a collective participant story, as was the case in Huber and Whelan's (1999) research. Mishler, (1999) who studied craftartists' narratives of identity and on which much of this research design was founded, focused on five craftartists' lives and lived experiences, not to generalize, but to tell the stories of craftartists'. As the intent of this narrative inquiry was to have participants tell the stories of their lived experiences and not to generalize the data to all Midwestern, urban teachers the sample size was four.

For the purpose of this study, race and gender did not play a specific role. "When qualitative researchers decide to seek out people because of their age or sex or race, it is because they consider them to be good sources of information that will advance them toward an analytic goal and not because they wish to generalize to other persons of similar age, sex, or race" (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Traditionally, in elementary education, gender does play a significant role, with the majority of the teachers being female. However, according to the U.S. Bureau of Statistics (2016), 43% of teachers at the high school level are male. The goal of this research was to determine teacher self-identity within the profession and how that identity influences interaction with students, regardless of gender or race. There was no focus on generalizing the experiences of a particular group of teachers based on gender or race, or any other subgroup, and because of this was not used as a criterion for participation in this narrative inquiry.

As I have lived and worked in the area for my entire career, I utilized administrators I knew within local districts to find participants that met the requirements of the purposeful sample. Letters were distributed to potential participants, based on

administrator recommendations matching the criteria required, and requesting participation in the study. Potential participants completed a short questionnaire requesting information including name, grade level taught, and years of experience to ensure that sampling criteria was met, and contact information. Each questionnaire had an envelope in which potential participants sealed the questionnaire. Envelopes for potential participants were turned in at the school's central office and were picked up by the researcher at a designated time and place. This process was designed to protect potential participant confidentiality. Based on questionnaire responses, the researcher then determined four participants based on purposeful sampling criteria.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Qualitative research is not an attempt to make generalizations about the world; rather it is to explore a particular piece of the world. "What we are doing is trying to make claims about how a particular slice of the world works and how people in specific locations (spatial, theoretical, and metaphorical) understand their world and specific actions and meanings in it" (Horvath, 2013). What are the experiences – past, present and future – that teachers narrate about their career trajectories that give meaning to self-identity and how that identity influences student/teacher interaction?

To explore these narratives, this research focused on the semi-structured interviews to elicit teacher experiences. According to Braun and Clarke (2013) qualitative interviews reflect the following characteristics: variation according to the style of the interviewer and the response of the participant; use of an interview guide prepared in advance that is flexible and responsive to the participant, inclusion of open-ended questions that encourage detailed responses; intent to capture the range and diversity of



participants' responses; and co-construction of meaning between the interviewer and the participant.

To achieve the depth of narrative required for this inquiry, three interviews were held with participants, with the interviews being held at local libraries throughout the metropolitan area, based on convenience for the participant. The first interview involved focused questions on the moral sources and epistemological traditions of the participant that lead to participant stories around self-identity. The second interview focused on the teacher/student interaction. The participant was asked to bring an artifact or classroom object to the interview that focused on the participant's experiences of teacher/student interaction. To help the participant understand an artifact to bring, the researcher at the end of the first interview shared an artifact from her own teaching experience that helped the participants reflect and choose an artifact from their own experiences to narrate about the teacher/student interaction. The researcher's artifact was a picture and story that explained a moment in the researcher's teaching career when she realized that stereotypes that she held about certain students in her class resulted in her having low expectations about those students. The third interview was conducted after participants had read the researcher's write up of the narrated stories.

**Moral sources and traditions.** The first set of questions for the first semi-structured interview was designed to focus on the experiences that teachers had around the moral sources and traditions influencing self-identity (Coldron & Smith, 1999). These included personal histories and traditions that were formed by the context and social spaces an individual inhabited while growing up, leading to entry in to the teacher workforce. The research design of these questions prompted the participant to

thoughtfully reflect on the reasons for becoming a teacher, their beliefs about teaching and students at the beginning of their careers, and their current beliefs around teaching and learning. These questions included:

- Could you talk about your decision to become a teacher? Who or what influenced you in your decision to become a teacher?
- How do you feel about the educational climate today? (Identity in the profession)
- When your first entered the profession, what were the challenges that you faced? How did you cope with those challenges? Have those challenges changed or are they still prevalent today? What are the challenges you face in the classroom today? (Identity in the profession)
- If you had to pick a metaphor for your first year of teaching, what would that metaphor be? Does the same metaphor apply today, or has it changed?
- When you entered the profession your first year of teaching, what was the educational climate at the time? Do you think the climate has changed from your first years of teaching?

**Epistemological traditions.** This second set of questions for the first interview included the revealing of experiences that helped to form a teacher's epistemological traditions (Fairbanks, et al, 2010). This included a teacher's identity within the profession, personal practice theories, vision, and sense of belonging. To guide teachers to narrate experiences around the epistemological traditions, the following questions were used:

- What would your ideal classroom look like? (Vision)

- Is there some type of guiding philosophy that guides your teaching? What help you know how to react in uncertain situations when you aren't sure what to do? (Personal Practice Theories)
  - How do you know the best way to reach all students?
- How does interaction with colleagues impact your vision and your guiding theories? (Belonging)
  - If the answer is it doesn't, ask do you feel like you belong in your school?
  - If it does, how does the interaction with colleagues reinforce your beliefs and thoughts about belonging?
- How do federal and state mandates influence what you are doing? Do you find these mandates helpful or a hindrance?

**Student/teacher interactions.** The second interview set of questions was designed to have teacher participants narrate experiences around discontinuity (Mishler, 1999) in their professional career trajectories that had changed the narrative professionally for themselves, and the students with whom they work on a daily basis. These questions included:

- What artifact have you chosen to represent you as a teacher?
  - Would you describe it to me? How long have you had it?
  - Why is it significant? What does it mean to you?
  - How does it represent what you do in the classroom?
- What in your personal background influences your teaching and interaction with students today?

- Is this different from what you did in the first years of your teaching experience?
- Who is the student sitting in your classroom today? Describe him/her.
- What does he/she think?
- What are some of the influences on the level of motivation of your students?
- In what ways do you connect with your students? How do you foster or develop a connection with your students?
- How do you build a relationship with your students?
- Describe a time when you had great success with a student. What made it successful? What did the student do? What were you doing?
- Describe a time when you struggled as a teacher. What happened? What were you doing? What were the students doing? Was there a context or outside factor that was causing the struggle you were having?

**Personal experience narrative.** The third interview was conducted after the completion of transcription and my piecing together of the participants' stories (McCormack, 2004). This interview focused on my intention of how to present the stories in the final narrative of the research project. The participant's narrative was given to the participant a week before the actual meeting for review by the participant, with a set of questions. These questions included:

- What were your general impressions of the narrative?
- Did you feel as if your stories were accurately portrayed within the narrative?
- Is there anything in the write-up that you are uncomfortable with?

This member-check with the participant provided me with the confidence that I had represented the participant's narrative accurately and co-constructed the narrative story as told by the participant. Interestingly, I sent all four participants their narrative. One wrote back that she "stood by" what she had said, and really did not need to meet with me, and one wrote he was concerned about an identifying feature in the narrative. Once I changed the language he also expressed we did not need to meet. The other two participants did not respond to the email, and a subsequent request via email also went unanswered.

### **Data Analysis**

**Transcription as interpretive analysis.** Riessmann (2008) argues that transcription and interpretation of that transcription are sometimes viewed as two different processes, but in fact, should be considered the same process for the narrative inquirer. Careful attention must be paid to detail the representation of what was heard in conversation with participants, and essentially "straddle the border between speech and writing...transform[ing] a complex verbal exchange into an object that would serve as a representation – my imitation on a two-dimensional page of what had been said between us" (p. 29). With attention to this idea of creating a two-dimensional representation, I carefully reviewed the audio files and created the transcripts, with strict attention paid to not just what was being said, but how it was being said. Transcription included participant pauses, visible emotions (i.e., laughter, facial expressions), and body language, as these aspects of the interview added dimension to the spoken word, understanding that this process was what began the interpretive analysis of the participants' lived experiences.

**Coding.** Saldana (2013) suggests that coding is a process of assigning short words or phrases to linguistic-based data, that provides a systematic order to the data supporting meaning making and explanation. The process should consist of two cycles, first cycle coding and second cycle coding. He writes, “First cycle coding are those processes that happen during the initial coding of data...Second cycle methods are a bit more challenging because they require such analytic skills as classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, abstracting, conceptualizing and theory building” (p. 58).

For first cycle coding, I began by using descriptive coding as defined by Saldana (2013), a process that “summarizes in a word or short phrase – most often as a noun – the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (p. 88). Proceeding through the participants’ transcripts, I paid attention to empirical codes as well as a priori codes that appeared within the context, based on participants’ responses to the interview questions. This coding process was assisted by computer software created by QSR International, *NVivo for Windows 11*. As Bazeley and Jackson (2013) state, “the developers of NVivo promise only to provide you with a set of tools that will *assist* you in undertaking an analysis of qualitative data. The use of the computer is...to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of learning” from the data (p. 2). The premise was to use the tools that NVivo provided to help organize the first cycle analysis, which in turn will support a deeper understanding of the codes later in the analysis process.

While descriptive coding gave the basis for analysis of what the participant was experiencing, I was left dissatisfied with how to approach re-telling my participants’ experiences. Riessmann (2008) writes, “Stories do not fall from the sky (or emerge from the innermost ‘self’); they are composed and received in context – international, historical,

institutional, and discursive – to name a few. Stories are social artifacts, telling us as much about society and culture as they do about a person or group.” I found the answer to my struggle in the work of McCormack (2004), and the idea of “storying stories.”

McCormack (2000) reviewed participants’ stories to analyze what was said through multiple lenses: active listening, narrative processes, language, context, and moments. McCormack suggests that attending to participants’ narrated stories through this process “recognizes that no one lens can reveal both the individuality and the complexity of life. Multiple realities suggest multiple perspectives. Looking through the multiple lenses...provides this multiplicity of perspectives...dimensions people use to construct and reconstruct their identities and so give meaning to their lives.” Using this process supported my interpretation and re-interpretation of the participants’ stories in relation to self-identity and teacher/student interaction.

Using McCormack’s (2000) idea of “narrative processes” I first attended to locating the stories within the transcripts. She suggests that stories within the transcripts are “bounded,” and are easy to delineate due to a series of linked events that portray a beginning, middle and end. Once the boundaries are determined, the narrative lens then explores where the participant describes (the who and what of the story), justifies (reasons for telling story), argues (contradicts or reasons), or theorizes (tries to provide explanations) within the stories. Second, I attended to the bounded stories using the “language” lens. Using this particular lens gives insight into what is said and how it is said, in addition to the importance of paying attention to what is *not* said. It focuses on language as a social process constructing individual identity and social relationships and language as text exploring the people, situations, and ideas the participants speak about.

Third, I attended to the bounded stories using the lens of “context.” Within this lens, there is the context of situation (the social process of the actual interview between the researcher and the participant) and the context of culture (the social, political, historical, cultural, and structural conditions in which stories are told and interpreted). Fourth, the lens of “moments” attended to the epiphanies and turning points in the participants’ stories, highlighting those areas of continuities and discontinuities in the participants’ work trajectories. The fifth lens, “active listening,” was attended to through the other four lenses, as I “reconnect with the storyteller, [and] the story...” focusing on my own personal reactions to the lived experiences being told as stories. After viewing the bounded stories through each lens, I coded each lens and wrote memos of my thinking in each of the bounded stories.

The next process in analysis is to tell the participants’ stories. Again, following McCormack’s example, she suggests titling each story and then listing the stories in chronological order. In my particular narrative inquiry, temporal ordering was not critical to the telling of the participants’ stories, so attention to the stories at this point focused more on content than temporality. Using first person point of view to tell the participants’ stories, I interjected periods of my own researcher introduction, and attended to the bounded stories that answered the research questions of this study, presenting each participants’ story in its entirety.

Second cycle coding focused on transcription and first cycle coding process, and as codes, themes and patterns emerged I continually used analytic memo writing as a way to provide physical evidence of the data collected (Hayes & Singh, 2012) during the data analysis period. These analytic memos also served to drive the iterative process (Galletta,



2013) that is required for critical analysis of the participants' experiences. Bazeley and Jackson write, "this is the point of saying "I've coded all my data. Now what do I do?" and proposes "a three-step process to apply to each of the categories or concepts that have been developed: describe, compare, relate" (p. 243). By attending to rich, thick description (Geertz, 1973), each concept that attended to the research questions was described and explained, with exemplars pulled to illustrate. According to Bazeley and Jackson (2013), the point was to constantly ask questions and challenge the data. By doing so, I was able to start building "a web of understanding and the beginnings of theory" (p. 243). It is throughout this work that Ely (2007) suggests that the narrative inquirer "must inevitably seek to reach increasingly broader, more nuanced understandings of what they have studied and to write in forms that honor such complexities."

### **Trustworthiness**

"The essence of the narrative research approach...is that the researcher endeavors to obtain 'data' from a deeply human, genuine, empathic, and respectful relationship to the participant about significant and meaningful aspects of the participant's life" (Josselson, 2007). Josselson suggests that at the heart of this respectful relationship are two contracts, the explicit contract and the implicit contract. The explicit contract is the formal, stated agreement that the participant and researcher enter into that outlines the purposes of the study and the rights of the participant. The implicit contract is composed of less tangible traits, such as how differing assumptions, expectations and contingencies that arise during the process are handled between the researcher and participant. It is Josselson's assertion that it is the implicit contract that exposes the trustworthiness of the

researcher to the participant. Compassion, respect, openness and self-disclosure on the part of the researcher elicits a high degree of self-revealing by the participant, resulting in richer data within the narrated experiences.

To ensure trustworthiness of the researcher and to emphasize the implicit contract between the researcher and participant, I used member-check, reflexivity on the part of the researcher, peer auditors, and rich thick description (Galletta, 2013; Merriam, 2009). First, the process of storying stories (McCormack, 2004) required that I return to the participant after the construction of the personal experience narrative, as this provided a “way to test the ‘fit’” of the interpretation in relationship to the way that participant understood his or her narrative (Galletta, 2013). This constant drafting and re-drafting of the participants experiences ensured that I captured the true essence of the experience that the participant was describing. Second, analytic memos helped to create a structure where my thinking was visible and part of the analysis process to highlight possible researcher bias while focusing on the study’s research questions. Finally, rich thick description allowed details to come through using physical, movement, and activity descriptions (Creswell, 2013). Using thick description provided an in-depth understanding of the topic, and allowed juxtaposing ideas to be highlighted with language usage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013).

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **PARTICIPANTS' STORIES**

The participants for this research were all urban high school, core subject area teachers, with 18 or more years of experience working. Each of these interviews took place during the months of November and December, 2016. This was a very interesting time in which to place these interviews, as the first interview was done the day after President Donald Trump was elected into office.

The conservative platform around public education at both national level and state level where these participants live and work endorsed the idea of privatization of education through the charter school system. With the political power that came with the election of President Trump, it would be interesting to see how these questions would have been answered had the election turned out differently. The influence of the events leading up to these interviews cannot ever be measured, but context of the current political environment added depth and meaning to the questions asked of Abigail, Kevin, Pat and Moana. As all are urban, public school teachers, the uncertainty of the unknown impact of what is coming can be seen in various places throughout the interviews.

## Abigail

Abigail is an educator that has been teaching for 23 years in a large urban district. She started with the intent of teaching kindergarten, but ended up in her first position as a middle school teacher. She says that middle school “grew on her” and she did that until nine years ago, when she became a high school English teacher, where she has taught 9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades.

**I’ve never been anything but a teacher.** Abigail constructs her self-identity around the idea that she has always been a teacher. She relates that even as a little girl, she was a teacher, and she has never been anything else. For Abigail, being a teacher is not a profession it is an identity.

I’ve wanted to be a teacher since I was playing with my dolls when I was four. I set up my classroom, my bedroom was a classroom, and I used to ask Santa for a Xerox machine every year. It never came, but that’s what I wanted cause then I could play school for real. I’ve never been anything but a teacher.

Another key component to Abigail’s self-identity is the desire to achieve professionally and attain accolades that come with success. For Abigail, there is a connection between professional development that leads to being a better teacher, and the accolades and awards given to teachers within the profession. “Well, personally I believe in professional growth. If there’s a bell, or whistle, or shiny gold star, I want it.”

Abigail was asked to bring in an artifact that represented something about her in the classroom. She felt that this was hard to find, but came in with a book called *The Sweetest Fig*, by Chris van Allsburg. It is a picture book about a man and his dog, and some magic figs. As Abigail reflects on the artifact, it becomes clear that the artifact does

not represent her, but what she values as a teacher: learning. The importance that Abigail places on learning is described in her ownership of learning, her framework for lesson planning, and her goals that she sets for her students.

First, I found out about this book through, I don't even remember which training it was, but it was like a demonstration lesson to some training that I went to. In that sense it represents my teaching in that I constantly keep learning. I like school. I keep going to school. Second, I did my student teaching in first grade, so I still plan in the same manner that my cooperating teacher told me. I always think in terms of before reading, during reading, and after reading. That's my frame.

The third reason I picked this book is because when I was a middle school teacher, my whole goal was to put at least one right book in every student's hands. That's changed a bit as I've moved and grown, and I am teaching in a different environment, but it represents that I've been lucky in my career to never have had to use a curriculum. I've always been able to be totally literature based and to teach whatever I want. So I've never used a textbook in 20 years. That has always been very important to me. Oh, and "The Sweetest Fig," I must admit I like things that get ya, so I don't know if you are familiar with this story, but there are these magic figs, and the dog eats one and everything changes. There is an ironic twist to it.

Abigail overcomes struggles and adversity as a teacher by being confident in her abilities as a teacher. When she first started at her high school position, there was some push back from the teachers who she works with around how she taught in her classroom.

Abigail, by being confident in who she is as a teacher is able to prevail through the adversity created by her counterparts.

When I first came to this school, I had a really hard time with the kids because the other teachers were encouraging them to act up, or were convincing them that I was not qualified to deliver a high enough education. No one would probably admit it, but they were influencing what I was doing in the classroom. The first year here didn't go so great, and the second year was even worse in some ways.

But, just by being super, super confident, - the test scores I was achieving with the kids, the work that I was giving them, and what we were doing in class – I guess that is how I got over that.

**Relationship driven.** Abigail believes in teaching her students about the world, not just about the content of English. She believes that many of her students will be successful in the high school environment, and will move onto college, but worries that some of them do not understand what is necessary to be successful in that college environment. She believes that building relationships with her students is the easiest way to control what happens in the classroom, and she works hard to establish and maintain those relationships.

Abigail describes herself as very relationship driven, and that to be a disciplinarian would not fit with who she is as a person. She believes in natural consequences and theorizes that students who get their work in on time will be more responsible adults. Abigail, when explaining consequences to her students, uses real-world examples to teach life lessons as well as academic content.

I'm very relationship driven. I'm not a hard ass. I'm not a disciplinarian, and I think to try and be one would just set myself up for a lot of problems. I always say I am the person of 567 chances with the kids, but you will get to 568, and then you're in trouble. I believe in natural consequences cause it drives the kids nuts. I'll take late work, and I won't take any points off, but I say, "Guys, you're setting yourselves up to be crummy adults, you're going to pay a lot of money in late fees. That is totally unnecessary." The students that turn in their stuff on time get really upset that they don't get extra credit or that I don't penalize, and I say, "Why are you so upset? You're going to have a better life and more money in your pocket." Sometimes I get more pushback than others, and honestly? I can't keep track of that small level of minutia detail. Record keeping is beyond me, and I'm not going to even try because I will fail. So, I do believe in natural consequences. Even with cheating, I say to my students, "Yeah, I know you're cheating, but you're going to flunk out of college. You're going to take a \$20,000 vacation, and then you are going to come home."

For Abigail, building relationships is the key to managing a successful classroom. Abigail describes the things that she does to build relationships with her students. She begins with the challenging task of learning all the students' names within the first week of school. She finds opportunities to have small conversations with her students and uses the students' writing to share opinions and viewpoints.

The first thing that I do is make sure that I know everybody's name within the first week of school. Then I find opportunities to have small conversations. Sharing of writing that is opinion based and group discussions, along with

conversations are all vehicles to build relationships. I mean I don't know everything about my students' lives, and in some cases, I don't even think that is appropriate. If I offer extra credit, I make them do something cultural, so I make them go outside of themselves. We always participate in multicultural read-in programs so that they have to get up and attend and they have to read. In situations like those that are outside of school? Those tend to build relationships, too. Most of my reading is nonfiction. I mean we read a little fiction but it's usually based on essays. An example was the book that we read called *Shadow Work*. The kids hated that book. It's about the unseen tasks that fill our days and it was just talking about how businesses have put a lot on to the consumer. For example, mobile deposits. Before somebody would be providing that service, and now you have to do it yourself. My kids had a fit. They thought that the author was the most lazy, narcissistic person they had ever heard of, and that this is just the way the world works. Just because she remembers how the world used to work, the students felt she should just get over it and get in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It was hilarious. I was all ready for my students' outrage over how society has changed, and instead they were outraged with me that I would even think that this was a problem. I tried to tell them, "Guys, you have shadow work all the time. The idea that I can email you at 7:30 at night and say do this, and you have to do it by the next morning? That's shadow work." I told them that the only way a teacher could get a hold of me when I was in high school is if they called my house phone and talked to my parents. So I was trying to win them over to my side, but it didn't work. Yeah, it's things like that, that help build relationships – getting to



know your students' opinions and views, and them getting to know mine. I must admit, I don't hesitate – and maybe if I taught somewhere else it would be different – but I don't hesitate to slyly put my political and personal beliefs into my classroom. I make them read a lot of things of that nature.

Abigail explains the success that she has had with one particular student from this year. She states that the success that she had with this student was not academic, rather behavioral, and is based around that idea of building a strong relationship with the student.

I'm not going to pick an academic story. There was a young lady, her middle name was sarcasm and she was always a negative, negative person. She wouldn't stop talking in class and had a negative outlook. Sometimes she would try and derail different people or point them out and ridicule them. We've worked very hard on that, and I would point out to her when she got positive feedback. She's always been one of the highest in the class so it was never an issue of her doing work or participating in class, but then negative behavior needed to be worked on. It was a transition, just modeling appropriate behavior, and letting her know when her behavior was sarcastic and negative. At one point, you could just see the arguments that she would have with herself on her face, "Do I want to give the teacher a hard time? Nah, it's not worth it." I brought it up to the other teachers on her team so they also pointed out to her every time she had negative behavior. It slowly moved her behavior. We've managed to turn that around, and she is nothing but positive now, and leaves little post-it notes in various places in my classroom telling me to have a good day.

While Abigail sees her students as very focused on getting good grades, she says that for them, it is about earning points for tallying grades. She feels that this creates a disconnect for her students between learning for the sake of learning, and learning to get a grade.

My students are grade grubbers. I must admit that control can be had through grades and all my students are very grade conscious. They want to do well. They want A's. Extra credit moves them. They're basically good kids, and whether it's the right fit or not, they all have aspirations to higher education. They all will be successful in high school, they will all graduate, and they will all be accepted to college. I have a student who is a senior. I had her both last year and this year. She really, really, really wants to do well. She received a scholarship this past summer. She works hard, but does not always want to put the work in. We were doing her essays for the scholarship, and I made her change all of them, and she was very upset and had an attitude and was fussing with me. But in the end, she did it, and ended up getting the scholarship. I think that is very representative of her, and the rest of the class. They know they want to do well, they know they want to go to the best colleges, but I don't think they know why. All the kids that go to my school are supposed to want to be doctors, but that's not realistic for all of them. I think sometimes they're fed a storyline and they don't necessarily push back on it in the sense that they are able to come up with an alternative plan. It's pervasive to the school culture. We have a ceremony in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, it's like an awards ceremony on steroids. The students go up on stage and they get jackets with the school name and their name on it, and they are awarded pins. It's very

much a part of our culture. And for a core group of our students, yes, they fit. But it's not for everybody. As a result, some of them get to college and are changing their majors and transferring and wasting time and money. There wasn't any alternative path thought out beforehand.

Abigail describes what motivates students in her classes today. She begins by theorizing about intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. To Abigail, it seems as if there is a constant push / pull between time available and work ethic on the students' part when it comes to completing work.

On some level the students are very intrinsically motivated. They want to please their parents and their teachers so I think it's on multiple levels. I also think that they're extrinsically motivated with the status. In my school, it's cool to be smart, and it's not cool to be dumb. A negative motivation on the students is their work ethic – well no, that's not true. I think my staff does not do a great job of balancing the demands that we put on students. They receive a ton of homework. Even I give homework this year, because we only have 57 minutes instead of 80. But some nights they have way too much homework, to the point where kids tell me that they pull all-nighters, or that they worked until 2:00am. It's ridiculous. I think part of the problem is that they don't work efficiently, but part of the problem is that they receive too much homework.

These beliefs about students are illustrated in a story that Abigail narrates about a current student. In this story, she reveals a disconnect between her idea of student ownership of learning, and the student's idea of how Abigail should be helping her.

I had a girl in this elective class, that had me last year, and she said to me, "I signed up for this class this year because I know I am not very good with my writing and I wanted you to help me more. I just feel like you're not giving us the feedback that you gave us last year." And on some level, she's right. Last year I told them where they were going wrong and how to fix it, this year I show them what's wrong, but I don't tell them how to fix it. It's up to them to ask me. So then I said, "Well, I gave you five days in class to write this paper with computers. How many times did you come up to my desk for a writer's conference?" And she just stared at me. Taking personal ownership, it's changing, and not for the better. I don't think it's an urban thing because a lot of our kids don't come from the inner city. A lot of our kids come from outside the city. I have nieces that are in the 9th grade and I don't think they'd do very well in my class. I don't think that kids are held to standards. I know I sound old, and I know children are entitled, and I know it's the world we live in, but I think there is a bigger disconnect this year between I want and deserve an A and what I have to actually do to get the A.

**It's just awful.** Abigail's view of the future of public education is very bleak. She believes that in the current political climate, that public education as it is today, is going to either change drastically or be eliminated altogether. She believes that the current educational climate is "awful," and that while teachers are being held to high standards by political and social systems, the support for teachers to attain those high standards is almost nonexistent. For urban education, Abigail sees a disconnect between holding students and teachers accountable and what is going on within the social and family structures of urban students.

For Abigail, the decline of public education started the year that she was hired, because that was the year that the governor of her state pushed a voucher bill through the legislature.

It was the beginning of the end, because the year that I was hired was the year that the governor passed the voucher bill. There were 70,000 kids in my district at the time; now there are 38,000 and 2/3 of our schools are charter schools. It was the beginning of making special state laws for urban districts, and it was the beginning of the cycle of labor unrest. When I was hired they thought I was a scab. I took a chance because I wanted a full time job so desperately. They had already given notice two weeks before to strike, so they thought I was a scab. And that has come full circle, because we don't have a contract, because, I can say it, I work with idiots and they turned down a perfectly decent contract and still wondered where their 2% raise was. Now we have that same labor unrest. I think we're probably going to get a contract, but we don't have one because the teachers don't want to give up their leverage. I think the idea that we still have a teacher's union is a miracle, after the plan for our district. I think legislation removing collective bargaining rights will return, I've already read an article about it. Do I think it will be terrible for my district? No, because I think we've hit bottom. I just think that the rest of the state is in for a rude awakening if you're not an urban district.

While Abigail is suggesting the beginning of the end for public education started when she was hired twenty years ago, she suggests there is a definitive end coming

within the next four years. Abigail's theory about the future of public education is that it will be challenging for new teachers, just starting out in the profession.

I think our climate is awful. I'll be in a better position as they destroy public education, but I think what has happened with my district is what they are going to try and get away with. But I have to tell you, as a taxpayer, if they start giving my money away to private corporations, I'll never vote for another levy again. I think on some level, we will be lucky to have jobs in four years, but hopefully it will take longer than that to gut public education. I think they are going to try.

They've taken all the money out of my district that they can. I think I'll be able to shut the door, hopefully, but I don't know about these new teachers. I think they are going to eventually be working for social security and very low wages. I don't want to be right, I hope I'm not, but I think there's a level of turmoil and change that happened in my district in the last 10 years that is coming to everybody, eventually.

Abigail works where there is a district created teacher evaluation system. All other districts in her state follow the state teacher evaluation system, and Abigail sees some unpredictability in her district's evaluations, as it relates to ranking teacher effectiveness, and in how it compares to the state system.

Our evaluation system is more cumbersome than the rest of the state's. We have five mandatory standards, and we don't get off cycles for skilled and accomplished ratings. We also have multiple growth measures, not just one. They (the district) set the test, they set and target, and we have no choice in that. You are not allowed to move it, it's like it takes it back to God. Before, the old state

reading test could accurately predict the students' ACT reading score, even though the test measures two very different things, and they take very different amounts of time. One is a minimum test of skill and one's a college readiness exam, but now they don't have that old state test anymore, so they use NWEA. Did they use the new state test data, which I think would actually be a little bit more apple to apple since that test was so hard for 10<sup>th</sup> graders last year? No. They are using NWEA data, for ACT targets. I know, nonsense. It's statistical mumbo jumbo. They assure me that statistically it's right on, but no one can explain the statistical process. I'm bitter, very bitter. I missed accomplished by four test scores two years ago and one test score last year. I picked the wrong class, it's like the lottery. I pick the wrong class every year. I just gave up this year. I didn't look at all the data or give them a pretest, I didn't do any of that. I just picked the two highest classes and kept it moving. So we'll see, that could be a disaster but we'll find out at the end of the year. That goes along with my gold star mentality. My principal rates me accomplished and I miss it like by five points on the rubric every year.

For Abigail, there is no way for the evaluation system to accurately reflect what a teacher does, because she believes that teaching is an art form. Her sense of belonging within her school and the educational system rests with what she does with children, and how she interacts with her students, not how she performs on an evaluation.

My colleagues are such a piece of work. When I first got there the Latin teacher would tell the students that I was teaching them wrong, and of course, the kids would come and tell me. I told them there is no right or wrong way to teach in

English, and anyone that tells you there is, lies. As crazy as it seems, yes, I have a sense of belonging, but with the children. I've worked very, very hard to prove my competence. My school is like swimming with the sharks. Not everybody can. I never knew that I could. That was something I learned about myself. There are three teachers on my team that I have a sense of belonging with, and two straight out new hires that I have half a sense of belonging. I'm bold to them. It was shortly after I got hired in my district that they laid off teachers. I never got laid off, but there were hundreds behind me, so I was the young teacher waaaaay longer than I was supposed to be. And then I went from being the young teacher to being the really old teacher, so it's kind of weird. I do have three close colleagues that I team with, and we talk professionally and are encouraging, but that's it. Like I tell the children, I don't really care what anyone else thinks.

Abigail perceives the environment of her school as being very competitive and attributes this competitiveness to the difference between her early teaching career and what is happening in her current situation.

The place I work with right now is very competition driven. I happen to have a collegial team and we work together, but I'd say that's a quarter of the staff, and three quarters of the staff really, really kind of works against each other. It's very competitive and not team driven at all, but we manage to work together. We do intervention plans with students and we'll meet individually with students that are off track. I team a lot with the science teacher. We do a lot of reading and writing strategies together in both of our classrooms as well as college visits and field trips. I do believe that our team is really the only functioning team in the building.



Other than my team members, I don't really trust anybody at that school, and I wouldn't. I look for district opportunities to be professional, like the master teacher committee, being a resident professional development facilitator, and working with third year teachers in the new teacher program. That was not the case in my old school: we would have book clubs and we would work together. You know, it was a middle school, and it was when the middle school teaming concept was in, so we met every day as a team. I know I have been lucky because I have only had two principals in my career, and the reason I left that middle school is because my principal retired. That school was very collegial, and now, my high school, it's not the same. Now, the default position is, and it was very baffling to me my first year because I interviewed to get in there, that they think that everybody new is stupid, and then you have to prove that you're not. Why would you hire somebody you thought was stupid? That's stupid. But you know, that is what it is.

**Abigail, the competitor.** Abigail's stories that she narrates seem to focus on a self-identity that is competitive in nature. She is a strong, confident teacher, and has a belief in herself and what she does in the classroom. The competitive nature is the strongest within herself, as she clearly states that she wants the awards and accolades that come with teaching for herself, and is willing to work for those accolades and awards. There is, however, a competitive nature with the other teachers in her building, based on her perception that they do not all approve of what she does in her teaching. Her interaction with students is based on building strong relationships, and as long as her

students have faith in her, she does not seem to care what anyone else in the building thinks of what she does within in her classroom.

### **Kevin**

Kevin, a high school math teacher, has been back in the classroom for the past several years after having been an instructional technology coach for his district. He identifies his leadership and teaching styles as those used in the coaching model of leadership. He is not interested in telling students what to do, but rather in helping them find the best ways that they can be successful. While Kevin questions why students tell him he is a good teacher, the stories he narrates indicate that teaching for him is more than just the content of math. He has a generative nature, building relationships with students, and is interested in helping students succeed beyond the classroom.

**Teaching was what I wanted to do.** Kevin is currently teaching in the district that he grew up in. He attended the high school he teaches at as a student, and after becoming a teacher had both his brother and sister in class. With the exception of his first year of teaching, Kevin's entire educational career, both as a teacher and student, has been in the district in which he currently works. He has a strong sense of meritocracy and encourages his students to work hard in order to obtain the capital needed to attend college.

It's kind of cool. I think I knew since middle school that teaching was what I wanted to do. My mom was a teacher before she became a homemaker but she had never really pushed me towards that. She was a math teacher so I guess I get some of my brains from her and from my dad who was all into computers and

everything. It was in high school that I had Mr. P. He was a teacher here and I think he pushed me and told me that I would be good at teaching. He recommended the university he attended and I ended up going and getting lots of money from my high school district for being in the top ten of my class. At the time my dad had lost his job like a year before so it helped. I was telling my students about that, the idea of getting money for scholarships and I told them, “You guys need to put in the work and it will benefit you in the future.” So I knew that I wanted to come back and I ended up teaching one year in another urban district and then I came back home to this district.

Kevin understands that idea of having a network that supports in learning the cultural, social and economic capital needed for his students to be successful in their future endeavors is important. This seems to have been influenced by his personal background and the work ethic that he learned as a child growing up in his parent’s home.

Work ethic comes into it. It’s where it starts. There was a lot of importance in our home for things like money management, in terms of credit cards, at a young age. So when college hit and we got that first free credit card, I had good dialogue with my parents about how to go about building credit rather than going into debt. That’s always a plus to have someone in your network to kind of help guide you through those things. I think I like the coaching aspect of moving something from point A to point B, you know, helping identify students’ goals to see where they actually want to be.

Kevin explains how he is relationship oriented with students. He is very focused on helping students understand the struggles that they are having and how they can get on track for whatever goals they are trying to achieve. The supports that he provides to his students seem to extend beyond the four walls of the classroom.

I'm very relationship oriented and that tends to get me in trouble in terms of classroom management. I really want to dig down deep into a child's life and ask, "What do you want to do? Why are you here? Why are you in this position?" This year, because they are not offering credit recovery during the day anymore, they ended up doubling kids' math loads. So they have to take Geometry and Algebra 2 the same year if they failed Geometry the previous year. They want the kids to be successful but they don't have the support structure for the students to do that. I had a talk today with my Geometry class about how they are going to have to go into Algebra 2. That's part of their credits because they need four years of math now. After Algebra 2 they pick either quantitative literacy or pre-calculus. They're not giving students a choice anymore of just saying, "I don't want to be good at math." It's not an option anymore, so how do you help someone deal and cope with that? What kind of structure can we put into place to help them with that? Because I am relationship oriented I really want to know from kids how they got into this mess and how they can get out of it. I ask them questions like, "What do you want to do in your future? Where do you want me to guide your education?" I tell them, "I want to help you get there, but I need you to have a certain thinking in order for you to get there."

When asked about testing and accountability, Kevin's identity as a parent, and his identity as a teacher, intersect. He became what he describes as an active voice in his community's push back against standardized testing when he saw the way his own daughter was affected by the test.

I'm coming from the parental standpoint also. My community is the community where the whole pushback against the testing mania started, and I was an active voice in that too, when I was seeing my children being affected by this. My daughter is in the third grade, and had to take the state test that has to be passed to move to the fourth grade. She's a smart girl, and my wife wanted to make sure she had a good breakfast and she went to take her test. Later, I asked her, "How'd you do?" She answered, "Ummm, I guess okay." She is going to be fine, but the words that came out of her mouth next were, "I'm afraid of not going to the fourth grade." What third grader at the beginning of the year should be afraid of not going to fourth grade? It makes no sense. You know, I've always dealt with testing since it came out. I was encouraging other teachers to use computer programs to make sure that the students would be fine on the test. But hearing it from my own daughter. I told her, "Honey, you don't have to worry about that at all, you are okay." Why is that part of things, anxiety of a third grader? That's when I realized, you know, that something had to change.

As Kevin talks about his current teaching situation, he admits that the past several years have been somewhat of a struggle for him. It seems as if he is trying to find his place in a top-down management system that new administration has put into place in his district.

Last year was kind of my growth year to discover other job opportunities. Things didn't go through that year to be elsewhere, which was kind of hard, but I had to create that mentality of kind of like being in another system. What would that look like? Did I have value? Everyone that I talked to here said, "Yes, you have value. Please, you have value. But, I need you to just do this right now." But it's sort of like, where do my passions lie now? It's been 20 years for me, where am I going to be the next 15 years? You know, do I want to be with kids? Do I want to be directly in front of the classroom, or can I help empower other people in front of the classroom? I've learned in my administrative program that there are different styles of leadership and I realized that I'm a coach, and the tech integration part of me just comes out. How can I empower teachers to be better than me? I'm not going to have all the answers, but as an organization we have to figure it out. Where is this going? As long as we are top-down, we are going to see a high attrition rate of teachers and students until that levels out. Who really is passionate enough to take on all that stuff? Who knows what the end is going to be?

Kevin took pride in implementing the coaching model that allowed him to be able to help teachers and students alike with technology integration. Now, with the changes that have happened in his district and in his position, he feels misplaced within the school culture.

I'm a techie. I used to be the go to person for so many things. You don't know how to do that? Go ask Kevin, he can help you. I'd go in and coach you whenever you needed help, with both teachers and students. If a student was working on a

presentation, and you needed access from home, I showed you how to put it on your phone. Suddenly, administration is saying that, “This is what you need to do now, teach math, because the structure for your tech job is no longer in place. We see there is a need for technology in the curriculum, but...” It doesn’t matter. What matters is they have a structure. Um...the technology is not there now. It’s like there’s this huge loss, there’s this huge void. It’s kind of like, where does Kevin fit in? You want me to teach these kids? Okay. But it’s very challenging to do because there are time constraints because of all these other things, and I only have two things, so I shouldn’t even be complaining about it. We have this new engineering and robotics program, and it’s so funny. There’s another teacher and myself, and we were both trained in the science lab. So this year comes around and they ask me to do the science lab, and the other teacher to be trained in the new engineering and robotics program. In essence, if they would have asked, I should be doing that and he should be doing the science lab. He is so science, and I am so hands on robotics project stuff. I should have been trained in that and all they had to do was ask. But because they just assumed... Where’s our input? Even if you have an idea of how it has to go, you should have someone at least feel like they were heard. You’ve got a better chance of being successful just by being heard a little bit. Make it seem like we have a voice.

Kevin believes that if every student learned coding as the foundation of math, and if they learned to problem solve like coders, that they would learn all they needed to know to be successful. Kevin is captivated with the idea of coding as a profession, and even suggests that he might become a coder when he retires from teaching.

I should go into engineering now, I mean as like my post career. I'm always very hands on, and I'm very organic. I'm actually talking to a few students right now. I want to start a coding academy, an afterschool coding club. I don't care about extra money or pay or whatever. These kids have a passion for playing games, and they are starting to learn some stuff, but there's no opportunities for them to just learn how to code. I'm not in that position anymore to kind of push it across the district, so I just need to find a few people and let's just do it, man. Let's just learn together. I think a lot like a hacker. Every issue or every problem that there is, I want to be able to hack it and find the solution for it. Let's work together on that solution. But it just feels like it's just been, "No they have to teach math that way," and, "That's not what is tested, that's not on the test." But if you could really, to me the foundation of math, if you could really teach a kid to code, and teach the kids to think if/then, "If you do this, then this happens," you'd pass the test out the wazoo. You wouldn't have to worry about everything else, because everything else just falls into place.

**Think like an inverse.** Kevin's interest in his students is in trying to help them achieve their future goals. His narratives about his actions indicate, that while he is a math teacher, it is more about helping the students realize the skills and talents that they will need to be successful in the future. Kevin realizes that each individual student has specific talents, but questions if he is really capable of uncovering those talents due to other urban factors that affect the students that he teaches. Kevin strives to understand his students at a very basic level, wanting to know how he can help them move forward in life.



When asked what Kevin thinks his students are thinking he answers that he believes that they are only interested in whatever is happening on technology at that particular moment in time, and that for learning to take place, there needs to be an emotional connection.

My students think about whatever is happening on SnapChat and whatever is going on right now in someone else's world, because they do not really want to be where they currently are. It is all about how to make an impact to remember things. You know, you can remember your first kiss, you can remember your favorite meal. What causes that? It's a kind of endorphin that goes through your body and you can remember those events for the rest of your life. So what if I related that to learning and gave you something to remember? What if I came in and said, "I need you to know the Pythagorean theorem. What's the Pythagorean theorem? It's  $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ ." And then I smacked you. For the rest of your life, you would remember, "Mr. Kevin slapped me, in order for me to learn  $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ ." Because there is something emotional about it in order to get you there, and our kids are so freaking emotional about everything. But they're not emotional about their own grades. They're emotional about everything else going on in the world, but how do we get them to be passionate or relate things about learning to remember them?

Kevin believes he does have students who want to succeed, but they do not have the knowledge or skills required to achieve that success. According to Kevin, curiosity is the vital component that is missing from the students in his classroom.

I have kids that have dreams of doing something, but they just have no idea how to get there. They're just told to do certain things more out of compliance than anything. Like, what does a grade really translate to, why do they need certain grades? I wish I had more curious kids, you know, as to how things work and why. I was learning something the other day, about the moon and the solar system, and I was fascinated by the fact that we see the same side of the moon at all times from the earth. I was like, "How is that possible?" I couldn't understand it. I had to ask another teacher. We started playing with it and asking, "How is it rotating, and not rotating?" When I figured it out it was kind of cool. I'm a very curious learner, you know, and I want to make sure I know it before I try to explain it to someone else. I'm not afraid to ask somebody. We need kids to say, "I don't get it, but I'm not going to give up on it. I really want to get it." I think there's too much giving up in education today. You know I had kids taking the final and they were like, "Well, it is what it is." And I asked them, "Did you prepare? No? Well, okay." They're just satisfied with a certain grade. If they took time to practice it, maybe they could get it. I guess that is where teaching comes in because maybe I could do a better job and say, "You need to come in after school once a week, and I'm going to give you an extra grade for coming in once a week to get extra help. Then I could make better connections for you during that time together." I could do a better job, there.

Kevin believes the value for his students in learning math is to learn how to problem solve and persevere when trying to decipher complicated problems, and not in

the math procedures, themselves. It is the coaching leadership model that Kevin believes will support him in doing this.

There are all these different kinds of models of ways in which you can communicate in a leadership role. I've always just identified with coaching. If you could just talk to somebody and get into their brain a little bit and ask, "Where do you really want to be," you can give them a purpose towards learning something in the first place and then maybe there can be some success. I'm doing Algebra 2 now and there is lots of stuff that the kids just have to do. They want to know why, because it is hard. So I tell them, "You will probably never use an inverse in real life, but if I can get you to think like an inverse, and think what to do, that's the closest I can get to helping you out." If you go into computer programming or other certain jobs, you're going to need higher level mathematics. But most of our kids aren't going to go into those higher level math courses. It is a shame, because it is in those courses that you really get to critically think about things. There is value in just problem solving the problem, without any real life application. When students complete that type of problem solving, they feel good about themselves. It teaches them to be persistent and there's value in that. It's about getting kids to be patient and work through the problems.

Kevin, using his coaching leadership skills, builds relationships with students. He recognizes that the student sitting in his classroom today is very different from the student that he had when he first started teaching, and this realization causes him to wonder what talents are important to recognize in his students today.

There's this one kid named Sam. Last year I was really having a sucky year. I didn't want to come to work, those kinds of things. Sam visits from life. I had him eight years ago, maybe. I remember his mother just passed away, and he was sitting in my regular geometry class. I remember this kid had such a gift, but he was just so distracted by other stuff. I pretty much pulled him under my wing and told him I wanted to push him into my honors geometry class. I told him I wanted him to tell me what was going on his life, that I thought he could really do this, and that I would support him. So Sam came back, and we talked and now he is a computer programmer, he's travelling around and solving problems. He said he could trace his success back and he said, "It was because of you." It's just certain things that make all the world different. I wish I had the same kind of connections now. Maybe I do, I just need to tap into them more. To say I could really see certain things in certain people, and start pushing them towards that, it's too hard to identify today. There's so much baggage that kids have these days, it's hard to tell if they have a gift towards something because they're just beaten down all the time.

Kevin understands that certain students he has taught over the years may not have wanted his support or help and that he cannot force students to take opportunities that he might provide.

There was this one kid, and I was in college with his older sister, so I looked at this kid and I knew he was smart, that he had ability, but he just didn't care. I tried to connect with him, but he just didn't care and was cutting up and stuff. I told him that as an alternative there was a program he could go to outside of school,

and that they could really help him. I told him I would set up the appointment, meet him at school, and drive him down there to go to the appointment with him. When the time came he did not show up. He kind of let me down, but I realized that you give people opportunities, but there still is a point in life where they need to get into the car. Maybe he made his way down there, I don't know. I honestly don't know what he is doing today. I can't just put it all on me, they have to make choices too. Hopefully they make the right choice when it comes down to it. It was kind of a let-down, but I have other people to worry about. I can't just worry about that one kid that I think has ability, but won't take help. There's someone else out there that might need me.

**Frustration.** Kevin is frustrated at several levels with the educational system. At the national level, he is perplexed by the idea of testing to determine if students should pass to the next level or not. At the district level, he is frustrated by a top-down management style that does not include its teachers in the decision-making processes. This creates a strong sense of disempowerment and dissatisfaction with the job within Kevin.

Kevin, when asked to create a metaphor around education today, focuses in on the lack of nurturing of students today that stems from a testing mentality that he believes is the focus of education.

If you think about the nutrients in the soil, it is the foundation of the plant that you want to grow. Where do you want to be when the tree is this large? Do you want the tree to give great fruit or do you want the tree to give substandard fruit? I think that's the way we need to start treating education and treating people in

education. It's not about you and your job. It's about a child who's coming up at the age of three in preschool, now in fourth grade, then seventh grade and so on. How do you build that system where the child is getting those nutrients throughout their life and what do you want their talents to be based on? How have you structured it? I think that there are so many bad things that can happen to the soil if you treat it badly. Why do we do the same thing in education? Why do politicians feel that there's this pressure internationally? Yes, we do have a problem in America, no doubt. But I think the way that they are going about it and the way it's communicated is not healthy for our system anymore. So if the idea is for things to fail they are right on top of it. I think they sugarcoat a lot of things - you know they might call it by a certain name. But the reality is our kids have turned into these robots that have to test. There is this pressure for the teacher to teach to the test to be considered successful and a great teacher. What kind of sense does that make?

When the Common Core came into being, Kevin had thought that there would be a stronger emphasis on how teachers teach, and how students learn, with a move away from standardized testing. He was disappointed to learn that this was not the case.

I haven't seen one thing come from the state that says we're in support of good teaching and learning. I haven't seen it, and you know, I did think it was going to come with the Common Core. But the testing that came behind it was not good. It was not good. The idea that we're supposed to be getting deep into the Common Core is fine, and we can do it. But when you put those demands, coupled by the

fact that we have kids that are so far behind, it's difficult to pace yourself at any kind of pace and have students feel successful about themselves.

For Kevin, there is a very strong line between this idea of *teaching* and *learning*. He feels there is a false assumption that if good teaching is going on, there is automatically going to be good learning. As a result, teacher evaluation, according to Kevin, focuses on the wrong thing.

I think the setup here is they focus so much on teaching that they don't really focus on learning or not learning. They just figure that if you have a good teacher in front of the classroom you're going to have a great class and the kids are going to learn. That ain't the case. To me, you want to encourage good learning habits. When do our kids do homework? When do they study, and how do they study? How often do they study? How do you get organized? I was the one that brought in Chromebooks, so you have Chromebooks in the classroom. But kids bring in a binder and they don't know how to get organized with either a Chromebook or a binder. They are all over the place because teachers are all trying different things. Teachers don't talk so that we can kind of say, "Hey, let's all try the same thing, no matter which class students are in." I don't care what grade you are in. How do you teach people to be independent learners when the focus is not there? So until they focus on that, it's going to be dire failure. You are still going to have kids coming to class saying, "I don't know where my stuff is." That's on you.

Kevin describes math as being a game that students have to play. He explains that he tells the students they just need to get through it, suggesting that the content that Kevin

teaches is not for everyone, but because it is required, students must just get through the class.

There needs to be an understanding that math is just a game that you have to play sometimes, just to kind of get through. I was talking to some kids today, and they showed me this thing about becoming an FBI agent. I looked at it, and I was like, “How’s your math?” They were like, “What do we need math for?” They’re going to find out once they go to apply. Certain fields need math, like nursing. I used to have conversations with nurses all the time about how they use math. They said they have these series of tests that they have to take that sometimes are on track with what they have to do as nurses, but sometimes it has nothing to do with it. They just need to know math. Why do they need to know certain things? So that they can pass the test. ACT and SAT tests are just about getting into college or getting a good job. I told my students, “It’s a game you guys have to play. You need these points to graduate, how are you going to get those point?”

Kevin places a great deal of emphasis on having his voice heard by the administration above him. He works in the same district he was born in and attended school in, as well as worked his whole career in. He describes what it has been like in the last few years with multiple superintendents, principals and other administrative personnel.

I’ve been born and raised here. I’ve seen my share of principals. We’ve had, I think, something like 13 superintendents in like 13 years, or something ridiculous like that. Same thing with principals coming and going. Before this last administration, the superintendent was non-renewed for her last year, so we were



without a superintendent for one full year. We had an interim come in to just help out, but he was very kind and said, “Just get it together, hold it together until we can get somebody else in here.” It was very empowering. At the time I was doing technology integration. People would ask for help and anyone who had the skill where help was needed would go, “Let’s do it.” It was very empowering for everyone. Our teams knew we wanted to grow and we knew that certain people had certain skill sets, and it was decided to empower those people to do it. And we were doing it. We actually saw growth that year. And then the new administration comes in, and they were very top-down. They came in swinging, and they didn’t ask us what we were good at, or where we wanted to be. They just said, “You’re going to be doing this, this is what your license says, so you’re going to be doing this.” Things have been slowly crumbling, and maybe things do need to crumble before they have to come back up again. Now I am in a position where it’s kind of like, “Alright, you know? If I’m here when it’s over, cool. Whatever.”

**Kevin, the coach.** Kevin’s stories that he narrates reveal a teacher who wants to see his students succeed, not just in the classroom, but also in life. He is an inquisitive teacher, and wants to help students solve problems and move forward, both in school and beyond the four walls of the classroom. Kevin realizes that while many students will accept his help, there are some that will not, and that even with all the support that Kevin can provide, his students ultimately have to make the choice to accept the support.

## **Moana**

Coming from a family of teachers, Moana had pushed back hard against taking on that role in her adult life. Despite her attempts to move away from teaching as a profession, several years into her career at an environmental government agency, she went back to school to get a teaching license. Moana decided to take part in a two year, urban teacher education program to get her high school teaching license. She now teaches science at an urban high school in the Midwest. While it is not a traditional high school but rather a magnet school for high performing students, Moana strongly states that they are still dealing with the urban problems that plague other urban high schools in the area.

**Service is very important to me.** Coming from a family of teachers, Moana was sure she did not want to go into education, but eventually realizes she cannot get away from it.

I fought being a teacher my entire life. So my father is a teacher, my mother is a teacher, and I saw what teaching was, and I had pretty much decided that I did not want to do anything like that. I went to school for an environmental science degree and worked for the federal government for several years doing environmental policy. At that point in my life I thought that is where I could make a difference. For some reason service is very important to me, but what I started discovering is that policy was very monotonous. I wasn't finding my passion in my interactions because it wasn't going anywhere. We would work on things, then we would table them and wait, and nothing ever got finished. One of my tasks was to work on developing educational pamphlets and activities for schools around water. I was contacted by the local school district and they said, "Hey, we

have some 7<sup>th</sup> grade students who need help with projects for their science fair. We were wondering if you would be willing to give?” At that point I was 23, I was like, “Sure, I’ll help,” and so I used to go into the city and meet the kid at the library. We did this tri-fold board on tigers and I would help him kind of pull that together. It was in that interaction with the student that I realized I might have been pushing the call to teaching a little too far to one side. It just kept coming back and hitting me in the face. So at that point, I was trying to figure out what to go back to school for, and I was thinking about environmental resource management, but there was no way I could fiscally pay for any of that. I came home for break at Christmas, and my dad, who at that point was still teaching in an urban district, told me there was a master’s degree program in urban education at a university in the area. It was 18-20 months, and it was for people like me who had degrees that wanted to transition into education. It was new, and I was part of the second group to go through the program. The urban component was never even a second thought. I didn’t ever really see myself not being an urban educator, so the fact that I would be able to tie pedagogical ideas through the program made me really excited. It’s funny now, because I made the decision at Christmas and went back and told my boss I was leaving in June to move back home. They held me, and let me work from home for another whole 12 months because they needed me to finish all the projects. It was a lot. I miss some of those components from that first job, but I don’t miss them enough to ever want to change what my decision was. I’ve been extremely happy and blessed that I’ve

made that decision because I think that I am fulfilled in my teaching in multiple ways that I don't think that my first job would have ever done.

Part of the urban component for Moana is that social justice has meaning in what she does. She defines social justice as equity of resources, equity of her time and equity of her expectations.

So social justice is huge for me, equity in terms of: equity of resources, equity of my time, and equity of my expectations. I have a wide variety of students in my classes. We are a "high performing" urban magnet school, and I use the quotes around high performing because we are still an urban school. The reality is we have some really stellar students, but there is also the other side, right? And so it can be one of those things where you have only kids who are ready to be in AP classes are in AP classes. They should have certain scores and certain skills, and when I started I kind of mirrored that. But now I really do believe that sometimes the students need the challenge and support of those expectations in the AP classes to know what they could achieve, and so I think that social justice and equity component is something that I really do. I try to mirror all my classes like the AP classes, even as I am grading their papers, exams and projects. I look to see who has surprised me and met my expectations and is thriving, and who has not. Then I try to figure out how to get them there. Honestly, these are the tenets of what really drive my teaching.

Moana views what she has done in the classroom since she began as a journey, and it is this constantly evolving journey that has kept her current and engaged with her teaching.

As long as you could tie whatever you were doing back to either research or a solid idea that could explain how it benefited the students, the administration at my first job was very supportive. I really honestly feel that the sky was the limit. The school at the time was leading the charge for transforming urban education, and people were attending conferences to support that new knowledge. Everyone was invested in the process of transformation. I was teaching earth science, still loving the environmental science component. I started doing fresh water ecosystem projects, like getting the kids out in the field by going down to the local zoo and sampling the water. I had kids cutting down invasive plants. All this in 20 degree weather, with the kids walking three miles to the areas we were working in. A local community development corporation would supply the materials and the local university would provide symposiums with my students. I had a colleague that I loved working with and the two of us teaching environmental science together was pretty awesome. Then, you know, the administration changed, and the people coming in really didn't get it. Then there were people who didn't really like that we would take kids out of school for these projects. So it was like, "You're not going to do that anymore." So I started to think about that idea that I didn't know if I could stay there anymore. That's when I heard there was a new school opening that really focused on science and medicine. They were looking for a teacher so I moved over there ten years ago. I started teaching ninth grade, and now have fully implemented the medical science pathway. It is very much problem-based, goal oriented towards a medical or health science career, so that has been really awesome to be able to do. I said I

was interested in teaching Advanced Placement (AP) classes, and now I am teaching those classes. That's kind of been what I think has been the catalyst of why I enjoy my job so much. I can kind of continue to evolve in this journey. If I were to look back at the last ten years, I think that seven of them I was teaching at least one new prep a year. For me, that keeps it exciting. It pushes me professionally to not become stagnate. Then as I get better with what I'm doing, I use that in multiple classes. I've developed some really great strategies for AP Biology, but I could use those same strategies in my tenth and eleventh grade classes. I've learned some things about how to infuse writing to help my students really understand my content. Those are all really great things, and I'm very blessed to be able to do them.

Moana explains that the journey of teaching is not a journey that she is taking alone. Her students, for her, are an important part of that journey. When asked to bring an artifact that represents what she does in the classroom, Moana brings a gift that was given to her by her students. The artifact is the letter of her first name made of wood, about 10 inches high.

This was a thank you present from my AP Bio students, and they all signed it, so their names are all on it. When I was thinking of what to bring that was sort of an embodiment of what I do, this came to mind. I keep it on the back bookshelf of my room. I have lots of little things like this, but this was one I could easily grab today. I think what it signifies to me is really the relationship that's forged on the journeys that I make with the students. This isn't the first one I have, but when I look at these names, I know where they are. I've seen them since they've

graduated or I've talked to them. So looking at those names reminds me of one, the impact that I can really have; two, the connection that I can have; and three, sometimes when I feel like I am too hard, asking too much, or coming off in a way that they don't understand, that really isn't the case and as long as I keep true to why I am doing this and remembering who I'm doing it for, that's it.

While Moana seems to have enjoyed her journey as a teacher to this point, she narrates a story of time she was struggling within the profession. She attributes the struggle to trying to do too much at her job. She describes how at the time she was involved in a lot of things in her building that were in addition to her teaching duties in the classroom, and having two young children at home. When faced with the shortcomings of what she was doing and not doing in the classroom, she at first was hurt and angry.

I believe the struggle I was having was that I was trying to do too much. When I was in it, I wasn't aware of it, but as I started to evaluate after, it's really the reason why I stopped doing a lot of things. The way that the feedback came to me was probably not the best way that I would have liked, but I think that it signaled to me that it's obvious that I am not doing things well. So at that point I was the senior class advisor, I was the student council advisor, I was the girl's tennis coach, I was the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade team leader, and was teaching three preps. There were lots of balls up in the air, and one of the extra things caused me to leave my room and go to a meeting about prom. So I put on the board, "Today is a work day. Get things done." It was probably not the best use of time, but at the same time, what choice did I have? So the feedback that came back to me was,

“You’re only paid to do one thing, and that one thing is teach.” And when it came back to me, what I heard was, “I don’t appreciate you and all the things that you do.” But as I sat and reflected on it, and cried over it – all those fun things that you do – it really started to become clear to me. My primary, like why I am here, is to teach. All those other things are great, but there’s not enough time in my life. I appreciated the opportunity to reflect. What my administrator said hurt bad, because there were a lot of things that I was doing for him for free. I was really angry when he first said that, and I don’t think the intent of his words was for me to quit everything, and our relationship became strained when I did. But I think in the long run it was better for the school that I abdicate all those things. I think it’s hard for teachers to do that. They hold onto those things.

As Moana journeys throughout her career, she seems to hone in on the things that matter most to her. She, at this point in her career, gravitates more towards those things that involve advocating for students, rather than managing the building.

I’m committed to equity of AP for every kid in our building whether you agree that they’re ready or not. I will die on that hill. I don’t care if you don’t think that they have the prerequisite, they don’t need a prerequisite. What they need is soft skills to learn how to be better and to understand that they aren’t going to be perfect, but that’s why they’re here. So I will be on that hill. But I won’t necessarily be on the schedule fighting committee. Whatever you want to do with the schedule, just tell me where to be and what day to be there, and I’ll do it. Or you know, when we start talking about students. I want to support students but I don’t necessarily feel like I need to have all the answers. Before, I would feel like,



“Well, we have to figure this all out today.” Now, I feel like I can abdicate some of that.

Moana realizes that she has changed over the course of her career in her interactions with her colleagues and how she views the work that she does. Some of these transformations were prompted by changes in her personal life, but there has been something that motivated her to change her interaction with colleagues and her level of engagement within the school.

I feel like there’s been phases of Moana - Moana 2008, versus Moana 2012, versus Moana 2016. Moana 2008, in a meeting with someone who had an agenda that was not my agenda? That would become a battle. I would be like, “I am not leaving this meeting until we either come to consensus or I’ve swayed you to believe what I believe,” and I was willing to do the work to do that. And then I had children, so 2012 Moana realizes that every battle can’t be that battle, and so it becomes which. I worked with a guy who worked for the military, and he’s like what hill are you willing to die on kind of metaphor, right? So it became which ones are you willing to commit to? And that limited interaction. Sometimes you would sit back and be like, “Yes.” And sometimes it would be like, “Another meeting?” But you would be willing to sit through that meeting and foster collegial relationships. 2016 Moana has really gotten to the point that, “I will be the leader of things that I am committed to.”

**We’re all human.** Moana believes in her students, and feels that with the right supports they can succeed beyond any expectations that are set for them. She strives every day in what she does to provide an equitable education to every one of her students,

whether they are engaged with the process or not. Having been trained specifically to work with urban children, she understands the complications that these students face and works to support them in the best ways that she knows how. This demonstrates a level of commitment to her students that is very high.

Moana describes telling her student teacher that consistency is the most important thing to have as a teacher. Moana has high expectations for herself and her students and she is not willing to lower her expectations or let her students lower theirs for themselves.

Consistency, that is the most important thing that I try to emulate for my student teacher. You cannot say one thing and then change it, because it will seem like a chink in your armor. You're up there and you're fighting the good fight, and then you say something and the students ask, "Can you change it?" – that's the worst! Students talk about other teachers doing that, about how everything becomes a negotiation, and everything becomes this loop hole. I want them to expect more out of themselves. I've tried to be consistent in my enforcement of my rules but my first year? I think I am much more confident in who I am as a teacher now, so like in my first couple of years I sort of had an idea, and I was pretty firm, but there was always those questions of, "Was it too much? Did I ask too much of them? Was it too hard? Should I negotiate with them?" Where now I have a much better idea what are reasonable expectations.

Moana recognizes the human component in what she does and this is what drives her daily classroom interaction with her students. She seems very aware of the conflict cycle and works to deescalate when conflicts arise. Moana articulates that it is part of her

job as a teacher to intervene with a student when that student gets in the way of his or her own learning.

We're all human, so you can't take things personally. I could be having a day that is influencing my interaction with a student. They could also be having a day that is interacting with my interaction, which is causing this giant cataclysmic reaction that just shouldn't be. Don't take it personally. Be willing to apologize if necessary and then start fresh tomorrow. For example, we're getting really close to finals and one of the students that I have in the eleventh grade does not do well with stress. He procrastinates which raises his level of stress. I assigned a project to my students on cancer research to use as part of the final grade to kind of minimize the stress of the midterm exam. This reduces the students' stress levels a little bit. So this student has decided the project was just too much, and that he should be able to coast for the next couple of weeks. He has decided to put his head down and not do the work. For me, there has to be some learning from the student's perspective, so I need to intervene to stop them from the behavior that's going to block the learning opportunity so that solid learning happens. So, I emailed mom and let her know what is going on so that she could be aware, and talk to him a little bit. He came into class the next day with an attitude, probably because he got yelled at because I emailed mom. I pressed a little bit to see his work, and he lost it. His body language was very loud. I asked him to go to the office, and as he is going he slams the door and mumbles something under his breath that any other place in the world where I had worked would have gotten him suspended or in school suspension. But I'm not going to worry about it. I

knew the principal was out, so there really wasn't going to be any repercussion. I knew that. The secretary calls because she does not want him in the office either, which I totally get, so I decide, this will be an opportunity to go one-on-one and talk to the student and figure something out. I have a student teacher, so this was possible. In twenty minutes we had a conversation about the need to finish strong and did he understand the choices he was making. I gave him an option and said, "You can go to in school suspension, it seems like it is open today, or if you don't want to, you can come back to class if you feel in school suspension would not be a good choice." He chose to come back to class and the mouths of the students when he walked back in the room, sat down, and did work - that to me - I got more cred for that than any other situation. You know I was thinking about this, and my student teacher was like, "How did you know to do that?" And it really stemmed from my whole philosophy. We have to be able to do this, and for me to be upset because you thought you would show me up by slamming my door - that's not about me, that's about you. So that's really my philosophy on how I interact with kids. I see them as a person first, and then realizing that our relationship to work together is so important. Then always remembering that tomorrow we will have to do it again.

Moana narrates how she has asked her students what motivates them and they have told her motivation is influenced by the teacher. She has a strong belief in what they are telling her and strives to be that motivation for her students.

I've asked my students what motivates them and they've directly said that their number one motivation is their teacher. I asked them to explain that a little bit

more, and they said that if the teacher has high expectations, and if the teacher has those expectations of me all the time, and if the teacher has those expectations of himself or herself, then I work harder. The reason I asked them was I was trying to get to know the difference in motivation in the students between certain classes. What was the motivation of this student in this class versus that same student's motivation in another class? The kids' answers were predominantly, "The expectations that the teacher set for myself, and the teacher setting for themselves. How can I be motivated to do well in a class if the teacher's always late?" My kids are observant, and honestly I think that gets underestimated.

Moana describes herself as a teacher who used to accept any assignment at any time, but realized that this only stressed her out. She worries that encouraging the point driven atmosphere that her students are so attached to will be a disservice to those students when they get out into the real world.

I used to be like, "Oh, you can turn it in whenever," and then I found myself completely stressed. It worked when I had only one prep, but as I started adding new preps and adding more course load and numbers of students, it didn't work so well anymore. I would just be so stressed with all the grading, and really felt like I wasn't doing justice to the assignments. So I read a book about grading fixes that help you to assess kids without everything counting for points. Because I work in a place where the kids are very point driven, where everything is, "Give me points." As they matriculate and move into this world, I'm not sure that points give them the skill set of just doing things because you need to do them. I really need to get them to understand that, "No, I am not going to grade every

homework assignment.” And when the student asks, “Well, then why should I do it?” I have to explain, “Well, hon, if you don’t you are not going to understand how to do the next part of what we are going to learn.” I started doing binder grades, where it’s more organizational points. I am not going through and grading everything for huge amounts of points, but I definitely try to keep them organized. But of course you have those two boys, and I hate to make it gender, but it’s usually the boys that are pulling papers out from I don’t even know, digging in their backpacks, rummaging around and pulling crumpled pieces of paper out, and they’re like, “Here it is! I found it!” That’s not my girls, they’re so meticulous. Everything is very organized, highlighted and labeled, every week, literally. They are SO point driven!

This concept of working in a point driven atmosphere becomes very evident when Moana talks about giving an Advanced Placement (AP) Biology practice exam. Her students performed well on the multiple choice section of the practice exam, but she says a lot of students cried when they got their scores on the free response.

So the assessments come, their first overall practice for the AP test, and they bomb the assessments. Not like a little bombing. There were tears, serious tears, crying, not from the multiple choice but from the free response because they don’t understand how to write. I tried to tell them, “It’s about writing for people to know that you know what you’re talking about.” And as a reader the students would talk around the whole thing. It was like someone had told them to write down everything that they knew and hopefully something will stick and they will get points for it. I told them, “I’m not going to give you points because you wrote

DNA codes for a protein when that is not what the question was asking.” So the kids were really upset, lots of crying. I have a couple of kids who are super competitive, one girl wants to go to Princeton, and they were not really understanding my philosophy. So I had a former student come in and talk to my students, and he says, “I need you to know that if you are not going to spend the time to actually understand what she’s asking you, and if all you’re trying to do is copy it so that you can turn it in to get the points, don’t bother. You already have the points.” And he’s right, because I do sometimes just give students points for turning something in. But I will write that if they directly copied it from someone or a website, “Someday, you are going to really need to know how to do this on your own!” So they were complaining to my former student that, “That’s just not right. Why are the tests so hard?” My former student answered them, “Because, that is how tests are supposed to be. Tests are supposed to be about can you answer a question about a topic?” It was very interesting, my former student looked at me and said, “They’re hard nuts to crack.” I said, “Yes, they are.”

Moana, being a strong advocate for equity and social justice, helps her students navigate a situation where they felt that they were stigmatized based on race. She uses a conversation she overhears with her students as a learning experience and connects it to future experiences that she knows her students will have.

I took a group of 36 students to a five hour, genetic lecture at one of the suburban high schools in the area. The bus, as usual was late, so we arrived late. I called and let them know and they said they would save us seats. When we got there, the seats were in the back of the space, which was okay. I didn’t have a problem with

that. The second half was for questions and answers, and my students were waiting patiently to ask their questions. The lecturer walked around to all sides of the auditorium answering questions, but walked right past our kids and didn't answer any of their questions. It was funny, because then on the bus the kids were having a conversation about it and they were angry, and I wasn't going to hide that I was a little disgusted myself. I asked the students what they thought going to university was going to be like for them if they went somewhere predominantly white, when a lot of the students don't look like them. I asked, "What do you think it will be like when you have those situations in college? What should we do?" We decided we would write a letter to the lecturer telling him how we had felt and email it to our AP coordinator to forward on. The AP coordinator came to me and told me, "I don't think that is what happened. I know him personally." I told her that I was there and that is what happened. It was funny because there was a little bit of pushback from the administration as well, telling me they thought I had misunderstood the situation. I was like, "No, I'm pretty sure I didn't misunderstand, and I'm pretty sure my kids didn't misunderstand, either." The AP coordinator said the lecturer was pretty upset and agreed to video conference with my students and answer their questions. I was really proud of my students for standing up and saying, "I don't think this is right, but I don't think we should necessarily scream here. Let's figure out how to let other people understand."

**What happened to the D (development) in evaluation?** Moana feels that the current educational situation is upsetting. She is frustrated by the lack of discourse where teachers are included, about what is happening in education. She suggests that teachers



would support a lot of the changes that are currently being implemented in schools if they were just included in the discourse and given an opportunity to be heard. She feels because this does not happen, there is a lot of pushback to what becomes mandated for teachers.

People who are not in education think it is very easy to be an educator. They don't believe that there needs to be a dialogue, and that it could just be dictation. "I will make mandates and edicts without really a dialogue or a discourse," and I find this really upsetting. I don't think that they value what's on the other end of the service, as being valuable. So in other words, "I feel like we can do it for cheaper. We can do it for less. We can make a profit. We can hold to standards. We do all these things." And there is no dialogue about what that should look like. It's almost like if we were to have a discourse about it, they think teachers and administrators would be against it. I don't think that's true. For me personally, talking to my colleagues, I believe that there are a lot of teachers who like the idea of benchmarking, and standards, and want to be able to see the growth that their students make. They want to be able to celebrate successes and have concrete guide maps of what we're doing. Right now that's part of the battle, but I think it becomes a battle because there isn't discourse. I feel like, "We'll tell you what to do, because you can't really know, and you can't really be a part of the dialogue." It goes all the way from the federal department of education, down to the state department of education, all the way down to the district.

Moana was a lead trainer for her district when they implemented the new teacher evaluation system several years ago. As a lead trainer she was very excited to see a model

of teacher evaluation that was based on providing professional development for teachers' deficiencies rather than punitive actions.

Our evaluation system in my district is very different from the rest of the state. When we started it, there were some people in administration that were very conscious of what the plan was asking of teachers. One principal said, "I was a teacher once, and now I am in administration, and I know what I am asking you to do is challenging, but this is a teacher development and evaluation system, and we'd like to focus on the D." That was the mantra that was given to me and other people who were chosen by the building to lead this change in policy. It made it very easy, because I loved that, I loved that it wasn't going to be, "Ha! You suck!" It was, "Hey, let's develop you. Let's figure out what your strengths and weaknesses are. What does your student data tell you? Where can we grow from that?" It was all above board and open. Now, every teacher is evaluated five times. There are two formal evaluations with three walk-throughs, so five touches for every person. If you can get an "accomplished" rating, you only get a one year reprieve, and then it's right back into the system. So really it was like the first year, let's try to help everybody understand the rubric. What does the rubric mean and how can we do that? It was all very easy for me to lead professional development. We talked about communicating with parents, effectively planning for student lessons, differentiation, and what best practices looked like in the classroom. Teachers were being evaluated and principals were seeing good lessons. Teachers seemed to be able to get the kids to learn things, but the district was still not on par. So the administrators decided that clearly, they had over-

evaluated the teachers, so maybe we need to just stop the professional development altogether. And so that's exactly what happened. We didn't get any information on when things needed to be implemented, and we did not have any more district wide professional development. It was like sink or swim, figure it out on your own. That changed the whole dynamic, because now it is not about the D anymore, is it? It's about the E, and so everyone is completely at this hyper level of, "All you want to do is nail me and fire me." The idea that, "I would develop you," doesn't appeal as much as, "I want to get rid of you." It's extremely stressful for teachers who aren't strong enough to professional develop themselves, or who don't have an inherent motivation themselves of what to do. And so they constantly fall into the victim roll.

The idea of professional development and improving what she does in the classroom is important to Moana. She describes a book she has been reading where the author identifies himself with being a lifelong learner. Moana says that really resonates with her, and that is how she thinks of herself.

In my five seconds of free time, I am reading a book, and the author's perspective is that he said he has always been the type of person who knew he would be a lifelong learner. I was thinking about that myself, because it was like if I'm reading this book, what lens do I read it with? How do I bring it to my students, and what can I take from this book? I think those are skills that you have either been cultivated to have or you naturally have them. I believe that my personal ability has been groomed. You know, looking and asking questions, starting with my parents and how I view the world. It's understanding that I don't have all the

answers and it is okay not to have all the answers, and you should be constantly changing, because change is not a bad thing, because you are changing to get better. But I think that if you are the type of person who really believes that they have learned everything that there was to learn, and now it just needs to be implemented, it becomes challenging. Because to that person, the mindset is they've already reached the end of what they need to know. And when professional development is suggested, this person is kind of offended because they have already learned what they need to know to be a teacher. When change happens they cannot reflect. They have to think in their mind, "Okay, well what does this mean for me?" To these teachers, the need to be professionally developed is perceived as being weak in the eyes of other teachers. These teachers believe that the only teachers who really need professional development are the bad ones.

Moana theorizes that teachers are "in the wrong space" if they don't like the students that they teach. She feels that sometimes the idea that a teacher does not like students manifests from feelings of being extremely stressed due to over evaluation and judgmental behaviors of administration.

I think you're in the wrong space again, if you don't like kids. I think sometimes the teacher's manifestation of him not liking kids is because he can't handle stress. He is stressed beyond belief and feeling like he is being evaluated all the time, so he has to be even harder on the student end, because he interprets pressure from administration as, "That's what they want to see." The number of times I've heard that, "That's what I've been told to do." It's like there is nothing

happening in their head. I want to ask them, “Are you sure that’s how you should have internalized that directive? To, you know, kick the kid out of class? For not preparing? Is that really what was said, or is that how you internalized it, and now that’s how it’s manifested in your teaching?”

**Moana, the lifelong learner.** Moana narrates that she understood at an early age about what it takes to be a teacher from watching her parents, and had decided that was not what she wanted to do. However, the call was too strong, when she found herself working at a government agency for environmental science and decided to become a teacher. She has proclaimed herself a lifelong learner and has realized that she is truly where she belongs. While she feels that she would have had a successful career if she had stayed in her previous career, she feels that she is much more fulfilled being a teacher. Moana 2016 understands what she needs to do to best support her students, and fights for the things she feels are worth committing to.

### **Pat**

Pat is a teacher that has been working in the same district that she grew up in her whole career. She attended school in her current workplace, and now as a teacher has worked there since the beginning of her career. Pat teaches high school History, but spent several years at the middle school level due to a reduction in force in her district.

**I always wanted to be a teacher.** Pat states that she always knew that she wanted to be in some type of service position. After looking at several different professions, she finally determined that being a teacher is what she really wanted to do.

I always wanted to be a teacher, a nurse, or a policeman. I loved history and in the eighth grade, I had a great teacher for history. I loved this teacher and I loved his

class, so I guess I've always wanted to be a teacher. As a senior, I did do some job shadowing, and I went to the hospital and spent the day, and I did not like it. So, I always wanted to be a teacher.

When asked to bring an artifact that represents her teaching, Pat describes a box that she has in her closet at home. Inside the box is a collection of letters, gifts and cards. These mementoes are important to Pat, although it is not something that she dwells on.

So at home, in my closet I have a box. A nice pretty box. I don't know where I got it from. Whenever kids give me something, a letter, a card, a gift, anything, I read it once, and may share it with my husband or would have shared it with my mom, and then I put it in the box. I have vowed to open the box the day I retire, read it once, and then my kids can read it the day I die. I don't like to live in the past, so I'm hanging on to these things, in the box. I've been teaching 26 years, I remember things I've put in there 26 years ago. Whenever anybody gives me something, any type of card, a thank you note, a letter, an email, I'll print it and it goes in this box that's in my closet. I didn't start the box with this intent, but the idea of just hanging on to it...I'll read it once, then my kids can read it. Because you know, I am sure every teacher would say this – teaching isn't what I do, it is who I am. I want to share that with them, all those lives that I've touched at least in that moment.

Pat, when asked to describe the biggest challenges at the beginning of her career says that she does not feel like she had very many challenges when she first started teaching. To her, it seems that this current period in education is much more stressful on her than her first year of teaching.

I don't even feel like I had challenges back then. I just think that – I'll speak to myself personally. I always listened to how teachers interact with students and I bank those comments and statements, and when I need them I pull them out. I'm always trying to learn from people. So I think when I was younger in my career, I guess the challenges for me would be having a bank of, I don't want to say bank. Knowing how to deal with situations, like if you never caught a child cheating before and you catch them, you don't know how to respond. You have to develop these experiences. So early on those were my challenges. Now it's all the other stuff, that's the biggest challenge for me.

Pat describes her relationship with students and how it is important to remember that every student is someone's child. She says that while she always thought this way, it was not until she had children of her own that she really understood that every student is someone's child.

I've never been the type of person to write kids up. I will if I have to – if some kids swears at me that is a whole different ballgame. I have two children, and I guess I look at each kid – and I mean this, I'm not trying to sound cheesy – what has guided me for 10 years is the question, "What if that was my daughter?"

Before I had kids I still did this, but I never put it in this context. I may stress out about a situation at night and replay a conversation in my head, but I honestly know deep down that it is not personal and that the kid is having a bad day because of something else. I know that. So I try not to take things personal.

Again, it's hard not to drive home and replay the situation. I just try to treat each kid with respect and I try not to take it personal. I let them get the last word in. I

try to deescalate the situation when I can. I do it every day. I have this girl that has been described in her IEP as having oppositional defiance disorder, and her issue is her cell phone. So I don't hassle her about it. I look at her, I give her an eyeball, and I'll take other kids phones, but it is in her IEP her phone is her thing, so I guess I'll just look at her. I'll kind of give her a nod. I never, you know, freak out about it. This happens every day, where other teachers would freak out. If kids say "I have to call my mom," or "My mom's texting me or calling me," I say, "Sure, go ahead in the hallway." Other teachers would absolutely say no.

Pat argues that teaching is not a science, but rather a craft and that for different teachers it looks different. Pat realizes that the traditional model schooling is what produces the best test scores.

Teaching is an art, not a science, a craft, and it looks different for different people. Our district is huge on differentiation. Well, if you have 28 kids, with 11<sup>th</sup> grade reading levels down to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading levels, with one set of hand and one pair of eyes – I'm sorry, I can't do all this differentiation. I want them to prove to me that differentiation works. Why don't they, in my opinion, just level the classes. I want some data that proves all this stuff they're saying works. The lowest scores in English were from a guy who is now an Apple instructor. He is fantastic with technology, but that was it. I think the technology should be a means to an end. And this guy, who was so fabulous with technology, had the lowest scores in the district. The best scores were from an old school teacher.



When asked about how well Pat feels she fits in at her school, there is no doubt in her mind she is where she belongs. She has built her professional life in this building, and feels a very strong connection to it.

You know, I grew up here, I went here, and I lived here until I was 27. It's as much my school as anybody in that building. It doesn't deal with anybody. I belong here, it's my school.

The day of this interview was the day before finals, and three days before winter break. Pat describes a realization that she had just that day. At one point during the day, when Pat's lesson review was not going well, Pat says she went into survival mode.

It's funny because when I saw that today's review was not working, I was like, "Just get me through today. Just fail. Get me through, get me through to next quarter." You know, it's what doctors do when there's a war. It's triage; you have to help. I look at my sixth and seventh period classes. Seventh period, up until today, was my favorite class. But that is because I've been walking this fine line, and they've gotten too goofy. And now, I've got to be the bitch. But this sixth period, it just has a negative vibe when you walk in. Not all the time. Just one girl, who when she is not there the class is different. She can't keep her mouth shut. She criticizes everyone. Looking at that class, I only have twelve students, and I swear to god, I'm going to have three kids pass. It has nothing to do with me, but what are my scores going to be? Of the twelve in that class, five failed last year. It's just – there's nothing I can do.

**I have two kinds of kids.** Pat believes strongly that she teaches two type of student: those who understand what is needed to be successful in education and life, and

those who are not understanding of those things. She feels that students today are very attached to cell phones and struggle to live within the moment.

It's not just the cellphones. It's being connected digitally. It's Snapchat, and Instagram, and Facebook. They cannot live in the moment; they cannot be in the moment. Even if I know their cellphones are away, because the students know I will take them, they're just waiting for me to turn around so that they can take a sneak peek. It's not every student, it's not my college prep classes, it's my other classes, this "other" student that I was talking about. I don't know if it's like this everywhere. Are the teachers where I live saying the same thing? I don't know. It's not just the cellphone either; it's the constant being involved in someone else's business, which is the social media. It doesn't end.

When asked to describe the student that is sitting in her classroom today, Pat again describes the two students she believes she teaches.

Well, I have two kids, I teach two honors classes, and honors where I teach are really just those kids whose parents want them with other kids who have similar parents, right? Likeminded parents. So I have those kids, those middle class kids, whose parents want them to do well and they realize that education is the way to get there. The other kids I have are those low income kids, who are getting some type of entitlement program and assume that everyone is getting some type of entitlement program. They are here because they have to be. It is very hard to motivate them, to get them to understand that effort will pay off. I think of my class today, these kids who just didn't want to review. If I were to ask them what they wanted to be, they would all tell me pediatricians and lawyers, every one of

them, without knowing how to spell it. Those kids just don't understand the connection between effort and achievement. If you are familiar with the mindset growth, they're fixed. They don't get it. You know, it's, "I'm dumb. I'm stupid. If I study it doesn't matter." They don't even try, and that is my struggle. How am I going to motivate a student, when I have to teach him about the Northwest Ordinance? There is no relevance to them with that. But I am bound to cover that. Pat feels that there has been a shift in the district's student population. She explains that her students have "deficits," and that her honors classes that she teaches today are more college preparatory, rather than accelerated, as they were in the past.

The reality is we have kids with such deficits. I teach honors 10<sup>th</sup> grade. It's not honors, it's not the same honors I taught 10 years ago. Basically my honors class now is college prep, I mean that's the reality. If I were to teach like I taught 10 years ago, I would have 10 kids pass, I'm not joking. I'm trying to reach them where they are at, and yet expose them to a high level of rigor. I can't do that unless you bring back tracking. If you bring back tracking, it would be easier for me to move people to the next level, but we don't track in my district. We have honors, but to me that's really just college prep, and then in our regular classes we have legit, genuine college prep kids in there whose parents aren't savvy enough to get them into college prep because they don't realize that honors is not honors, and they maybe aren't familiar with the system.

Pat furthers her idea of traditional schooling when she describes changes in her room configuration. She went from the desks facing each other at an angle, to all the desks facing the front of the room in rows.

For the last 10 years, I had my desks split, kind of angled towards me at a 45-degree angle, with a table in the back and a desk up front. But I went back to traditional rows several weeks ago because I had a group of kids that were making eyeballs across the room. It was really for classroom management. I had to put the desks back in rows and it was really more because of the maturity in my classroom. It's a management tool. I have it back to traditional rows now. I want all eyes on me, not that I am suggesting I am the center of the classroom, but when the kids are facing each other and I was talking, they're looking out the window, or at their friends. But now, if they're looking up, they're looking at me. I have found, looking back three weeks, that my test scores on Friday were the highest that it has been all year, and higher compared to other members on my team. Again, it was because all eyes are on me. They can't be looking across the room. I'd never put my room back.

Pat believes in the idea of being fair, firm and consistent, and not showing students anger when managing classroom discipline. Pat explains her actions and reactions to three girls that are in her classroom this year, and how using patience and persistence has helped her build a strong relationship with the girls.

I have this girl and the first day she walked into my honors class, loud. She is actually very bright, but she's very lazy. I have her third and that is kind of early for her, so she is frequently absent due to coming to school tardy. I never ask past teachers about my current students because I want a clean slate, but when the teacher next door saw I had her and her two friends, he said some things. He called then "the triumvent." I was like, "Oh, no." She was one of those kids, I'll

be honest with you, that is cautious of white people, white women in particular. So I had to be fair, firm and consistent. I didn't let her push my buttons. For example, the class is not allowed to eat in my room because I don't want cockroaches. I went over my rules the first day, and sure enough, the next day right in class, this girl pulls out a bag of cereal. I quietly walked over and said, "You have to put those away." She said, "I'm really hungry. I haven't eaten all day." I said, "Well if you really need those, step out in the hallway." She stepped out and then stepped back in when she was done. The next day, her friend does the same thing. I was angry but I never let her know. I just continued being firm, fair and consistent. A few days later I called home to all three girls' parents. The first girl, I told the mother she was doing a great job, and she really was. She was passing out papers for me, and was trying with her work. The second and third girls, I told the parent it was really hard for me to teach with their behavior going on. The next day, the girls just started coming around. I think it is because I made one positive call. I was consistent, I was firm, and I never lost my temper. I have a really good relationship with them now. They're chatty, but you know.

When asked about a student that Pat has had success with, she declares that the former students coming to her mind were not about success in academics. She says that it is never about the academics when it comes to success.

Well, you know, even when you asked that question, the people who are coming to mind are not academic successes, it's never academic. One girl is from my second year of teaching who graduated in 1997, so she is 38 years old. We're friends on Facebook and we still talk every once in a while. She needed a mother

figure, and I was that figure for her, which was unbeknownst to me. I don't even remember what I did, or what was said. She would come and see me in my room, and we've always kept in touch, and she has always told me, "You were the reason I went to college. You're the reason I have a degree in education. I don't know what I did, I just know it was successful for her. I have a girl this year; I may have mentioned her before. She's rough around the edges, three other sisters, and I've been told by the social worker that her mom is neglectful. She's got issues out the wazzoo. I would stay and talk with her after school and try to help her, but now she is back to being crabby again, and not talking to me, so I mean, what worked with my former student certainly isn't working with my current student. Sometimes I think the kids just want attention, period. It's part of their thing. I don't have time to ask her more than once if something is wrong. I just don't. I have too much on my plate.

Pat explains that she understands the importance of using humor to build relationships with her students. She says that she has learned not to take anything personally, and that she basically follows the rule that every day is a new day.

I guess I've learned not to take anything personally. Even if we are having a bad day, I'm never going to come back the next day and expect the kids to be mad at me. I don't hold grudges. I have a good sense of humor. I let the kids have a good sense of humor. If they get off track, that's okay as long as I can reel them back in. What's difficult for me is walking that fine line. I remember taking this class 15 years ago, where we learned that students who are in poverty, the lower social economic rung of the ladder, they need structure and they need discipline. My

style is pretty laid back in class. I am friendly with the kids and I don't blow things out of proportion. I rarely write kids up. Even today, I had a high functioning autistic kid swear in the class. I'm not going to write him up, I just pulled him in the hallway and had him sit there. I always try to deal with stuff myself. Again, it's walking the fine line between being personable and being a pushover. It's a constant struggle. I don't think that I would have fun if I was all business. I like to have fun with my students, but then you're opening that door to, "I gotta reel it back in, let's get back on track." I develop relationships I think with my sense of humor. I genuinely like them, and I think that they know I genuinely like my job. I'm happy to be here, and the days that I'm not they don't know it. And I show interest.

**The good old days.** Pat seems to talk about struggle with the current educational environment and feels that the climate is much harder to work in than it was when she started. The freedom to teach how she wants and what she wants has been reduced considerably due to state testing mandates. Pat describes her loss of control of what she teaches happened when her district began implementing the Common Core.

When I think back how it used to be, back in the "good old days," I just simply did my job. We've always given departmentalized exams, so I knew what to teach, but I had a little leeway to have fun with the kids and kind of connect with them. Now we have this state curriculum which is not relevant to their lives. I teach American History and according to the state standards should start after Reconstruction. But within the first set of standards there are documents from Colonial History, so even though I don't teach it, 25% - 30% of the state test is on

these documents. So I have to teach it. It drives what I have to cover which is somewhat micromanaging content. The other micromanaging is around what I do in my classroom. I believe that the superintendent only cares about the test scores, and that trickles down through the administration to us. So administration will dictate, for example, no parties in your classroom. I personally don't have parties, well I shouldn't say that I don't. I have rewarded classes with food for certain achievements, so it's not like I don't do that, but I don't have free days. I never have free days. But for a principal to tell somebody, "Well you can't show this movie," when I absolutely believe there's relevance to it, why not? I'm not saying I'm showing five days of the **Titanic**, but they don't even want us showing 45 minute documentaries. They're constantly talking about these Marzano strategies. When I look at the straight up, best teachers, they do that without even thinking about it. You know, our district has this instructional framework, which is just another name for lesson plan, and it's a form that we have to use. I can think of one teacher, had 100% passing rate on the OGT last time he taught it, he hasn't taught for two years now. 100%, doesn't even know what the form looks like, he just knows how to teach. So I think there's this constant throwing of these words and acronyms at us, when we, we know what to do. We know what works best. Pat theorizes that because of state testing she does not have time to explore the teachable moments that arise in her classroom.

There is so much stress with state testing. The way it used to be, I taught the curriculum, but sometimes, as long as I was teaching them life lessons and a life skill, I was okay with that. Kids loved that, parents loved it. So in my perfect



classroom I am teaching, but I am able to pull out these crazy stories, goofy analogies, and make it more applicable rather than just running through this curriculum and having them read documents. It's not as fun as it used to be. Like in my class, I talked about the Great Depression, and I was explaining to them about how banks were calling back loans. I was explaining interest rates and how banks make money. So I pulled up a graph and I showed what a \$200,000 home loan would look like at 5%, 7% and 12% to show them there's a huge difference, right? In my perfect world, those kids would have been better off spending 10 to 15 minutes with me really talking about maintaining good credit. I can't do that anymore. I feel I have to continue on with the curriculum. We have a pacing guide, our team all gives tests on the same days, give or take a day on each side. I don't have the luxury of spending time on, you know, more of the story. I have some great stories about politicians in general. I can't tell those stories to make those people seem real because I don't have the time to do that. It's from the state testing and my internal stress of getting these kids ready for that test and giving them the best chance to score well. I don't have time for teachable moments, and that is sad.

Another challenge for Pat is the micromanaging from her administration. She does not necessarily feel that it is impacting her classroom, but she really feels this as department chair.

Another challenge, micromanaging from the administration. It comes from the state because while we are not a priority school, we are almost one. You know, crap rolls downstream. I don't know if they micromanage specifically what I do in

my classroom, it's just more departmental stuff. You know we were asked as department chairs to go into the classrooms. I have 18 teachers including me in my department. We were asked to go into the classroom to observe rigor to help teachers increase their level of rigor. However, contractually I am not allowed to evaluate my peers, so as I said to the principal, and I love my principal, I said, "What am I supposed to be doing? I can't say to a teacher you need to do X, Y, and Z. Why am I in the classroom?" Well, it's coming from next door. I couldn't tell you what her answer to me was, but the bottom line was, I need to sit in these classrooms for no good reason because I can't tell teachers what to do. I can't evaluate them. I want to say to my principal, "If you want to increase rigor, then you need to get into the classroom, and you need to, as the principal, tell the teacher to increase rigor."

Pat describes how she feels the educational climate is today. She feels sad about how many people are against teachers, teacher unions, and anything else having to do with education.

It's sad. I am still proud of what I do, but there are so many people who are anti-teacher, anti-union, anti-fill-in-the-blank. I feel it's made my job harder. All the mandates, the unfunded mandates coming from the state has made my job harder. The data analysis process we are required to do, it is such a colossal waste of time. You know, I'm department chair, and I'm trying to play happy, good little soldier, but I can't sell something I don't believe in. I like meeting with my team but trying to figure out how to take that conversation and figure out which particular box to fill in on the form, it's tough. It's tough. Everyone feels it's a

colossal waste of time. We have to do a training next week, the department chairs, and the instructional coaches, about how to evaluate the form when the teachers complete it. Our principal has asked the state to bring in examples from schools who use these forms, and these forms are actually increasing achievement. I just think that we could use that hour every week talking about planning curriculum, sharing ideas, but instead we are trying to figure out how to take that conversation and fill it in on the form.

The context of the teacher evaluation system, for Pat, seems to derive from administration wanting to penalize teachers. She considers the process time consuming and stressful.

Teacher evaluation is another stressful thing. I don't know where our principals get time to do all this. They have to do pre conferences and post conferences. It's just ridiculous. Anyone can put on a dog and pony show, and they do. There are bad teachers, I'm sure in your building too, who twice a year do differentiation. It's just waste and stress. In the middle of last year we all got dinged down because we were using a process of sharing student test scores. Yeah, we shared, and scores were low, so we all got marked down. Why work so hard if you are going to get dinged? Plus our principals were all convinced they could only give so many accomplished ratings, because there are people who should be getting accomplished and they're not. Why work so hard and why get all these accolades? A woman in my department had her lesson shared out at a staff meeting because it was so fabulous. The principal is up there telling the staff that it was the best lesson he had ever seen in his life, and he gave her a skilled rating, not

accomplished. It just doesn't make sense to me, so why should she work so hard for this lesson that is announced to the entire staff of 180 teachers, if she is going to be ranked skilled?

Pat theorizes that the media's part in forming public opinion about teachers and the profession has made it hard for her to justify to outsiders the work that she does.

I think the public persona of teachers, thanks to people like Rush Limbaugh who's called us bottom feeding scum suckers, whatever he called us – that's part of it, you know? To sell what I do to people, to let them understand that I work 60 hours a week, and it's okay that I have, you know, a week off at Christmas, it's harder to do that now than it was years ago. I don't remember, but I'm going have to guess and say it was positive until 10 years ago. In my opinion, it started when right wing media kind of took over the airwaves and started to vilify public servants and union people, including teachers. That's just my opinion, but it's been in the last decade or so.

**Pat, the history department chair.** Pat's sense of identity and belonging within the school where she works is strong. She grew up in that district and has worked her entire teaching career within that district. She has taught at both the middle school and high school levels, has been an instructional coach at the district level, and now teaches History and is department chair. Throughout all 26 years of teaching, Pat has learned to be fair, firm and consistent with her students, and has learned that this consistency leads to building strong relationships with her students.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to explore the narratives that four teachers tell about their experiences in the classroom. These stories were then analyzed to determine what was revealed about teachers' self-identities within the profession, and how self-identity influenced interaction with students. Moana, Kevin, Pat and Abigail were urban, high school teachers, in core content areas, with 18 or more years of experience. All four of these teachers narrated experiences in terms of state accountability mandates and standardized testing practices.

The data collected through these four participants' interviews were analyzed to answer the following research questions:

1. What do teachers narrate about their experiences of the classroom?
2. How might narrated classroom experiences have shaped a teacher's self-identity?
  - a. What discontinuities or disjunctions in work trajectories are narrated in classroom experiences that support, complicate or contradict a teacher's self-identity?

3. How might a teacher's narrated self-identity influence his or her interactions with students?

Using a narrative inquiry methodology allowed for the processing of the current educational climate and the experiences that teachers are having within this climate through the use of teacher stories. These stories demonstrated the way that teachers deal with efficacy, agency and the structural and political forces that are affecting the current educational environment.

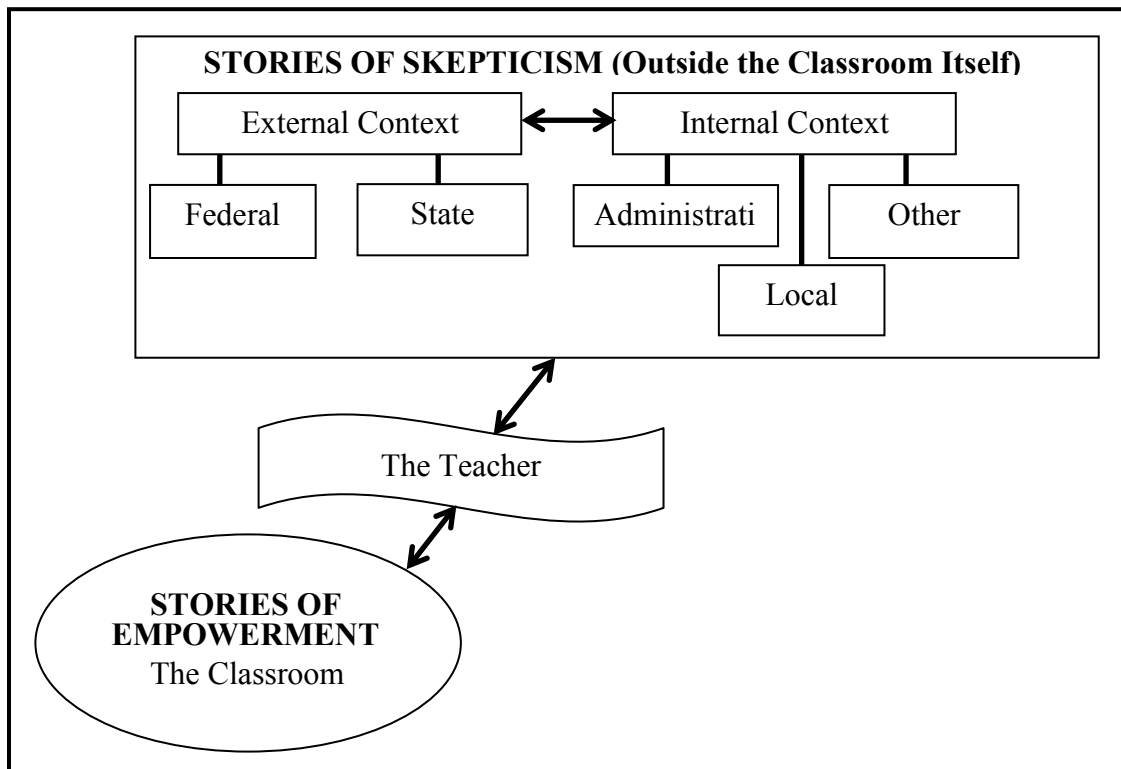
Mishler (1999) stated that the process of narrative inquiry is very autobiographical, and what the participants reveal in their narratives are the stories as they recall them in the current context. The idea that the teacher's role in the experience is an integral part of the experience itself allows for ontology of experience that is transactional (generating a relationship between the human being and her environment) rather than transcendental (conditioning human knowledge based on a priori experience), and corresponds well with the exploration of these teachers' experiences (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). The interviews elicited identities that were, as Mishler (1999) states, formed over time, including the continuities and discontinuities that either supported or disrupted each teacher's work trajectory.

### **Research Question One – Narrated Experiences**

*What do teachers narrate about their experiences of the classroom?*

**The context.** This first research question focuses on the context of the stories in which teachers speak about what is happening in education. Though the question states “experiences of the classroom,” these stories include all aspects of the teaching environment, the boundaries within the classroom, and those spaces that bump up against

the classroom (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996). This sets up the idea of parsing the stories narrated into two distinct contexts: empowerment and skepticism (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Stories of Empowerment and Skepticism

**Stories of empowerment.** Empowerment stories are stories that speak of strong teacher agency and control over what teachers do within the classroom. They reflect a general feeling of clarity, reward and success by the participants, empowering them in the journey of teaching. All four participants could relate empowering stories in the narratives they shared about their teaching experiences.

Recall the story Moana told of gaining credibility with her students as a result of her response to being challenged by an obstinate student. Her traditional response, as is most teachers, is to send the student to the principal's office. But she does it knowing that the principal is not in, and that there will be no punishment for the student. The psychology of this is fascinating – the student seems to be punished, but is actually given

a reprieve and second chance because the principal is not in his office. This then gives the opportunity for Moana to help the student uncover what is blocking his learning.

This story demonstrates how Moana's decisions on how to interact with one particular student are able to influence her interaction with all students. Her philosophy that everyone is human is important because it gives her the ability to build strong relationships with the students in her classroom, based on how she handles discipline problems. In this case, her relationships with the other students are strengthened when they observe how she handles an obstinate student. This, to Moana, is so important because she realizes that these students will be with her day after day throughout the whole year. It is her way of *making it work* so that she is empowered to teach and the students are empowered to learn.

Pat's empowerment story also reflects what she does within the classroom. She explains, "I develop relationships I think, with my sense of humor. I genuinely like them (her students) and I think that they know I genuinely like my job. I'm happy to be here, and the days that I'm not they don't know it. And I show interest." Pat is enabled within her classroom to determine the type of classroom environment that she will set up for learning. She does this with a manner that shows she is interested in her students and that they can count on her to adhere to the rule that every day is a new day. She believes in the importance of not taking things personally and uses humor to build relationships with her students.

For Kevin, empowerment came through autonomy to be part of the decision making process about what happened within the building and classrooms. During a period of lack of leadership in his district, an interim superintendent charged the teachers



with “holding” everything together until a new superintendent and other leadership positions could be hired. Kevin narrates how teachers took the forefront to make sure people were being given the resources they needed to teach in their classrooms. Different teacher skill sets were recognized and everyone supported each other. He said that this in turn empowered the teachers and gave them the opportunity to control what was happening in their classrooms. Kevin narrated that student and teacher growth was evident that year. The collaborative space that was provided to the staff of the building empowered them to really focus on what they were doing in the classroom and their interactions with the students.

Whether it was working with individuals to understand road blocks to student learning, using humor to create a positive classroom environment or being given autonomy to determine and fulfill the needs of teachers and students in a school building, all these stories demonstrate how having control over what happens within the four walls of the classroom empowers teachers. These empowerment stories seemed to provide a sense of satisfaction in the work that these participants were doing within the context of the classroom.

**Stories of Skepticism.** The second set of narrated stories is around a context of skepticism. These are the stories that teachers narrate around the structures of the system that are mandated or imposed on the teachers, including teacher accountability processes, teacher evaluation, district and administrative goals and beliefs, and public perception. These stories generally revolve around skepticism and frustration with structural forces in the boundaries that bump up against the four walls of the classroom, confusing and disrupting the teacher journey and formation of self-identity. It seemed hard for the

teachers as they told these stories to reconcile the believability of what they were being asked to do as being something that was beneficial to their students in the classroom.

When describing the data accountability process that her district uses, Pat talks about the frustration of time wasted figuring out procedures. “The data process procedure we are required to do, it is such a colossal waste of time. You know, I am department chair, and I’m trying to play happy, good little soldier, but I can’t sell something I don’t believe in.” The idea that team time is spent trying to figure out how to fill out a form, rather than talking about curriculum and instruction, confuses and frustrates Pat.

For Kevin, stories of frustration and confusion revolve around his districts top-down management style. “They came in swinging, and they didn’t ask us what we were good at, or where we wanted to be. They just said, ‘You’re going to be doing this, this is what your license says, so you’re going to be doing this.’ Things have slowly been crumbling.” Kevin’s power is taken away when he is not consulted on what his position should be and is told that he will teach something based on his licensure. This creates confusion for Kevin, and a skepticism that the new administration does not know what they are doing.

For Abigail, one of her stories of skepticism is around the future of education itself. In response to a question about the current climate of education, she states, “I think our climate is awful...I think on some level, we will be lucky to have jobs in four years, but hopefully it will take longer than that to gut public education.” Abigail is skeptical of public education surviving the current push for privatization that is happening at the national and state level of where she lives. Earlier in the story she is outraged by how a

government can ask her to support a school levy and pay taxes when there is a possibility that the money will go to private corporations that have setup charter schools.

These stories of frustration generally revolve around what is happening outside of the classroom, and reflect teacher attitudes of not having any control or ability to dialogue about what is happening in these situations. Because of this, there is a distinct skeptical nature when all four participants told these types of stories.

It is important to explore the context that these teachers narrate as experiencing within the educational environment. The idea here is not to develop grandiose ideas to solve world problems (Geertz, 1973), but rather to understand *something* about the context of teaching that these four teachers narrate. The breaking of these stories into two distinct contexts, empowerment and skepticism, show the constant push / pull that teachers seem to feel daily within their work. The experiences that are narrated within the context of the four walls of the classroom, and within the context of student interaction seem to support a positive stance for teachers, while those experiences narrated around the district, state, national and public structures seems to weigh these teachers down with confusion, frustration and negativity.

**The changing educational context: Past, present and future.** The stories that teachers tell of the educational climate today are heavily interspersed with negative connotations. All four of these teachers agreed that what is happening today is very different from what it was when they first started out. Words such as “sad,” “awful” and “aggressive” were all words used to describe this climate. Farrell (2006) wrote that how teachers perceived the climate that they work in influences the ability to effectively teach within the classroom.

For Kevin, the change has caused him to question whether or not he is in the right situation. After a career of 20 years teaching in the district that he grew up in, Kevin now considers moving on when he feels devalued by current district administration. He suggests that while he has a passion for the students, he feels the daily focus of education has changed so much that he is not sure this is what he wants to do anymore. He explains, “But it’s sort of like, where do my passions lie now? It’s been 20 years for me, where am I going to be for the next 15 years? Where is this going?” He suggests that his district no longer seems to focus on the student, but rather only on the teacher and what he or she is doing within the classroom that is successful or not successful. Kevin’s belief that this is a mistake propels him to think of other ways he could contribute to society outside of the teaching profession.

Abigail suggests that the year she started teaching was the “beginning of the end” for education as this was the year that the privatization of education began in her state with charter schools and school vouchers. Moana agrees. “I don’t think that they (politicians) value what’s on the other end of the service. So in other words, ‘I feel like we can do it for cheaper. We can do it for less. We can make a profit. We can hold to standards.’ And there is no dialogue with teachers about what that should look like.” Teachers are feeling left out of the conversation about what needs to happen in education today. Kevin admits that there are issues with the educational system, but having outside sources tell educators how to improve it, while not including them in the conversation is frustrating.

Pat refers to her first years of teaching as “the good old days.” She feels that with the inception of the Common Core, she has lost the ability to teach what she feels is

relevant to her students. She suggests that those who are trying to control what is happening in public education do not understand what it means to be a teacher. She is frustrated by what seems to be the buzzwords of education. She states, “I think there’s this constant throwing of these words and acronyms at us, when we know what to do. We know what works best for students.” The loss of autonomy in how and what Pat teaches and the constant pressure of students passing state mandated standardized tests frustrates and confuses Pat.

Abigail believes with the current push for the privatization of the educational system, that public education as it is known today will be destroyed. She feels that urban districts are already feeling this tearing apart of their systems, and will not feel the effects of what society wants to do as strongly as suburban and rural public schools. She states, “I think on some level, we will be lucky to have jobs in four years, but hopefully it will take longer than that to gut public education. I think they are going to try. I think new teachers are going to eventually be working for very low pay and social security...I don’t want to be right, I hope I am not.”

These stories reveal that each of these participants is feeling a distinct dissatisfaction with the current educational climate. The pressures of curricular control and standardized testing, the disconnect around what is critical to educating students, and the exclusion of teachers from the local, state and national conversations about education contribute to those narrated stories of skepticism, and leave these teachers feeling excluded from and frustrated with the teaching profession. These stories seem to invoke a theme of disconnect between the daily teaching inside the four walls of the classroom, and the overall context of the educational environment.

**External and internal contexts: Perception.** Throughout the narratives, participants spoke of different ways they felt that they were being perceived by both outsiders and insiders within the urban, public education realm. These perceptions seemed to break down into two categories: external contexts, and internal contexts. External context narratives are the experiences that the participants narrated about teaching that largely came from outside the local educational domain. This external context includes policy action and discourse at the state and federal level. Generally these were stories that teachers narrated around experiences of imposition of policies and a social discourse about teachers in which they were perceived in a certain way from outside their school system. Internal context narratives were the stories that participants narrated about the experiences within the urban educational environment. The internal and external were not always distinct, as there were policy connections and shared discourse that diminished teachers' control and agency in their classrooms.

**The external context.** Political policy making and public perception is changing the landscape of urban education in very drastic ways in the state in which these four participants live. Several years ago, there was an unsuccessful attempt to remove collective bargaining rights for unions and there has been a strong movement towards the privatization of public schooling through charter schools and a voucher system. Laws around standardized testing and a state wide teacher evaluation that included student growth measures on standardized testing as an indicator of teacher effectiveness have been implemented. As a result, urban teachers have been feeling the pressure of these and other mandates, designed to improve the plight of urban school districts.

While several of these participants recognized that there is a problem with urban education, the idea that entities outside of the system are dictating policy and mandates is upsetting. Moana explains, “I feel like they say, ‘We’ll tell you what to do, because you can’t really know, and you can’t really be a part of the dialogue.’ It goes all the way from the federal department of education, down to the state department of education...” She refers to the idea that legislators are looking for cheaper, faster and more economical ways to educate children. The current lack of input that educators have in the political conversation frustrates Moana, and she sees this as challenging her ability to teach. She feels that most teachers do want standardized curriculum and ways to measure benchmarks. The problem is that teachers are being left out of a vital conversation that directly impacts their work. The perception from these external conflicts creates frustration for Moana.

The week that these interviews began, the 2016 presidential election results were announced. President Donald Trump had been elected, and in the following weeks there was much debate over his proposed secretary of education, Betsy DeVos. Public education supporters opposed this woman who supported the privatization of the American public school system, higher accountability standards for teachers, and they perceived a complete lack of understanding on DeVos’ part of the challenges and issues facing public education, especially urban, public education. Had the election ended differently, it would be interesting to hear the participant’s narratives of their perceptions of the external context.

This external context is clearly described by Pat when she was asked her feelings about the current educational climate. She stated, “It’s sad. I’m still proud of what I do,

but there are so many people who are anti-teacher, anti-union, anti-fill-in-the-blank. I feel it's made my job harder. All the mandates, the unfunded mandates coming from the state has made my job harder." She continues in a later story with, "I think the public persona of teachers, thanks to people like Rush Limbaugh who's called us bottom feeding scum suckers, whatever he called us – that's part of it, you know? To sell what I do to people, to let them understand that I work 60 hours a week, and it's okay that I have, you know, a week off at Christmas, it's harder to do that now than it was years ago." It is interesting that Pat feels the need to "sell" her justification for her vacation time to this external context.

**The internal context.** While working against the external context's perceptions of the public school system, it also seems like teachers are struggling with a disconnect from what they perceive the internal context's perceptions are as well; those perceptions of district administrators and other teachers. Pat feels micromanaged by her administration when she is asked to go into the classrooms and observe other teachers for rigor. "We were asked to go into the classroom to observe rigor to help teachers increase their level of rigor. Contractually, I am not allowed to evaluate my peers, so I said to my principal...'Why am I in the classroom? I can't say to a teacher you need to do X, Y, and Z.'" Pat articulates that as department chair she was asked to *observe* teachers for rigor to help guide discussions to increase rigor. What Pat perceived they wanted her to do was *evaluate* teacher use of rigor. The experience that Pat narrates illuminates the disconnect that arises between district administration and teachers when trying to have conversations about what happens within the four walls of the classroom.



Kevin feels this same frustration of the internal context's perceptions when he narrates his administration's inability to see past student test scores. He stated, "When the superintendent sees our scores, he goes to the principals and says, 'You all better get it together.' The principal comes to us and says, 'You all better get it together.' And we're looking at them going, 'Can you all help us get our kids together?'" For Kevin, there is a disconnect between what he is doing, and what the internal context of the board of education and his principal perceive he is doing. He feels he does have an understanding of what is going on based on his district being at the bottom in terms of test scores. However, he feels that principals are pressured by board administration, so the principals turn around and put pressure on the teachers, but the teachers are looking back at the principals asking for help.

Abigail is frustrated with the internal context of fellow teachers who she perceives are trying to sabotage what she does in the classroom with students. She states, "My colleagues are such a piece of work. When I first got there the Latin teacher would tell the students that I was teaching them wrong, and of course, the kids would come and tell me. My school is like swimming with the sharks." The whole internal context of school and her perception here is interesting. Abigail later states that she does not trust any of her colleagues, and that when she was first hired, she felt that she was treated like she is "stupid" by the internal context of the school. As a result, Abigail becomes very competitive in her daily work life, which helps her portray the competence she feels is needed to gain respect.

**The importance of context.** The stories that teacher's narrate focus on the contexts that they interact in and around the classroom. Clandinin and Connelly (1996)

determined that each of these spaces was defined by “boundaries.” For Pat, Moana, Kevin and Abigail, these boundaries contain groups of people with different sets of expectations and perceptions of what teachers should or should not be doing in the classroom. While these perceptions are pushed down on teachers, there seems to be the thought presented by all four participants that teachers should be included in the conversations around mandates and legislation that will directly impact their work within the context of school. Including teachers in these conversations increases the likelihood policies may change reflecting teacher knowledge and increasing teacher willingness to follow through with mandates and legislation, rather than battle against it.

### **Research Question Two, Part A – Teacher Self-Identity**

*How might narrated classroom experiences have shaped a teacher’s self-identity?*

**Teacher self-identity.** Mishler (1999) used what he called a “critical analytic perspective” to uncover the ways that craftartists viewed themselves individually as well as within the larger social and cultural contexts. This identity was shaped, reinforced and disrupted throughout the experiences that the artists narrated about their lives. In applying the critical analytic perspective to teacher self-identity, two dimensions were explored: early self-identity and current self-identity.

**Early identity.** For each of these participants, the teacher identity was formed at an early age, even if it was not recognized as such. Mead’s (1934) perception of self-identity is that it is formed and revealed through a social context. For Pat, Moana, Kevin and Abigail, self-identity was formed within social context in which they grew up. Three of the four participants came from families where parents were teachers. For Abigail, there was never anything else that she wanted to be. For Moana, growing up in a family

where both parents were educators caused her to pushback against the notion of being a teacher, but she realized several years in to her career as an environmental scientist that she was meant to be a teacher. While Kevin's mother had stopped teaching to raise her children, she had started her career as a math teacher at the high school level.

Each participant's self-identity narrative reveals a strong relationship to Gee's (2000) identity formation categories. For Abigail self-identity was formed through a strong nature-identity (self is defined within nature), stemming from her belief in herself that there was nothing else she ever wanted to be. As part of her early self-identity as a teacher, Abigail associated being a real teacher with turning her bedroom into a classroom, and using her dolls as her students. To complete the early childhood identity that Abigail formed, she would ask Santa to bring her a Xerox machine. The fact that she started wanting to teach Kindergarten, but ended up teaching middle school for her first job, and then her willingness to go back and get high school certification suggests that the idea of being a teacher is deeply rooted in the concept of learning, rather than the teaching of a specific content or specific age level. She ended her narrative about becoming a teacher by saying, "I've never been anything but a teacher." From an early age, she had determined that she would be a teacher.

For Moana, the affinity-identity (self-identity formed through affiliation with like-minded people) played a big role in her pushing teaching away at the beginning of her adult life. She had seen what her parents went through as teachers and had determined that she did not want any part of that experience. After working several years as an environmental scientist, Moana is asked to help a seventh grade student prepare for a science fair. It is in that interaction with that student that Moana realizes, "I might have

been pushing the call to teaching a little too far to one side. It just kept coming back and hitting me in the face.” She realizes that she really does associate with the idea of teaching. While urban education does not seem to be a conscious choice, and more a matter of the fact that she found a program that would train her to be a teacher based on her previous work as an environmental science as long as she worked in an urban school, Moana believes she is much more fulfilled in her teaching job than she was in her environmental agency position.

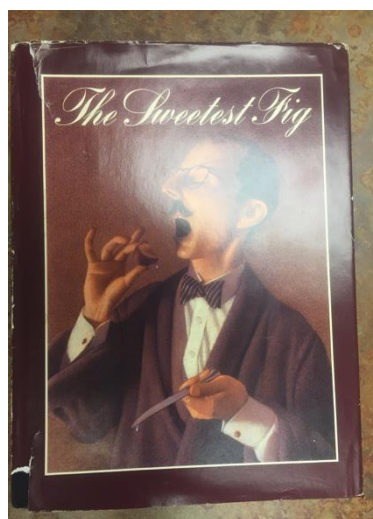
For Pat and Kevin, their narratives seem to reveal both an affinity-identity and a discourse-identity (recognition of self based on discourse or dialogue). Both attended school in the communities where they now teach, and both have spent their entire careers there. The experiences they had as children growing up in their communities reinforced for them the idea that they wanted to teach in those communities. Through discourse-identity, a high school teacher that “pushed me and told me I would be good at teaching” mentored Kevin. This teacher encouraged Kevin to enroll at the same university the teacher had graduated from, and through scholarship money, Kevin was able to attend. Pat knew she wanted to go into a service-oriented profession. An experience with a shadowing program at a local hospital helped her decide that nursing was not a career she wanted. Through a teacher she had in eighth grade, Pat realized that she loved history, and that she loved that particular teacher’s class, and determined that she wanted to be a teacher of history, also.

**Current self-identity.** Akkerman and Meijer (2011) suggest that in the post-modern world of globalization, self-identity is formed for individuals through the fragments and multiple social worlds through which they move on a daily basis. This

formation of self-identity is propelled forward by the social interdependence and meaningful discourse in which engagement happens. It is this engagement that makes self-identity an ideal analytical lens in which to study teachers lived experiences (Gee, 2000).

For Abigail, the stories that she narrates illuminate an individual whose self-identity is a competitor. She has a need to constantly seek out awards and accolades, and wants her students to understand that she is a good teacher. She admits, “If there’s a bell, or whistle, or shiny gold star, I want it.” This competitive nature is further reinforced in her artifact. She starts the explanation of her artifact by stating, “Okay, I had a really hard time with that because yours was very jazzy... I don’t have anything nearly that cool.”

Immediately, Abigail places herself in competition with me in the comparison of artifacts. The artifact that she did bring, the picture book, *The Sweetest Fig*, by Chris van Allsburg, reveals Abigail’s strive to be the best at what she does (See Figure 4). As the book was used in an in-service she participated in, she reveals that it demonstrates how she constantly strives to improve herself. The content of the book itself, a story



**Figure 4.** Abigail’s Artifact. “The Sweetest Fig” by Chris van Allsburg.

about a dentist and a dog that is treated poorly by the dentist, ends with an ironic twist where the dog “wins.” Again, Abigail’s self-identity as a competitor shines through.

Kevin’s self-identity is that of a coach. For Kevin, his self-identity is revealed in the interaction with his students, and the constant striving he does to help them meet their goals in life. Kevin is the advisor for an after school club that focuses on engineering. He expresses pride in what his students accomplish in this club, and his artifact is a picture of a poster board session where his students presented their current project (see Figure 5). Kevin states, “I love the way the engineers are coming in and talking to the students, as are construction people. They are the mentors for the students as they move towards the goal of the whole project, which is community.” Kevin identifies with the ability to bring in professional engineering “coaches” to help the students understand the reality of working within those professions.



**Figure 5.** Kevin’s Artifact. Student created display board for STEM Project

Moana’s self-identity is that of a lifelong learner. She is constantly striving for new ways to engage her students in the learning process. She emphasizes that she has high expectations for *all* her students, not just those in her Advanced Placement classes. When she has students who are not performing at the level she thinks that they are

capable of, she strives to learn why and how she can better scaffold her content for those students. Her artifact, a wooden letter of name, painted and signed by a group of students, reminds her of why she decided to go into teaching in the first place (see Figure 6). She states, “I think that what it signifies to me is really the relationship that is forged on the journeys that I make with the students.” For Moana, it is not just about what the students are learning, but also about what she is learning in the process of teaching her students.



**Figure 6.** Moana’s Artifact. A gift from students

Pat’s self-identity is that of the history department chair. She places great value in the lives that she has touched as a teacher, and this is reflected in her artifact that she shared. Pat is the participant that struggled the most when working to find an artifact that represented her teaching. When I first posed this request to her, and showed her my artifact, she told me that she did not have anything that would be like what I had shared. I never saw Pat’s artifact, but she shared with me the story of her artifact. It is a box that she has in her closet where she puts any notes or cards that she receives from students after reading it once (see Figure 7). She states that she may share the notes with her husband or mother, but after that she puts it away in the box, which is stored in her closet. She states, “I have vowed to open the box the day I retire, read it once, and then my kids

can read it the day I die. I don't like living in the past...teaching isn't what I do, it is who I am. I want to share that with them."



**Figure 7.** Pat's Artifact. A memento box filled with letters and cards.

While beginning self-identity seems nebulous to past selves, all four participants clearly narrate their self-identities that have emerged over their 18-year plus careers. Samuel and Stephens (2000) realized the identity “baggage” that teachers carried in their early years, helped those teachers to form their self-identities later on. For Kevin, his first year he taught he was a math teacher and the 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls basketball coach. He recalls having a very supportive principal who nurtured his teaching in a positive way. This in turn taught Kevin how to nurture his own students, and has given him the realization that his self-identity is that of a coach. For Abigail, the idea that she never wanted to be anything other than a teacher seems to give her the determination and competitiveness she needs to push back against those who would question what she does as a teacher. For Moana, it was the learning process itself, discovered as she helped students with a science fair project, which led her to go back to school and become a teacher. Her understanding of how important that learning process is has given her the self-identity of a lifelong learner. And for Pat, her devotion to the school district she grew up in and began teaching in her first year, has given her a strong sense of belonging. Becoming the history



department chair where her mentor first engaged her in the idea of becoming a teacher is the pinnacle of her self-identity.

**Is teaching a journey or a battle?** Dewey (1938) in his *Theory of Experience* explores the notion that past experience influences present experience, which then in turn influences future experience which is heavily influenced by past experience. This cyclical model of experience is narrated in the stories that individuals collect as they move through life (Coles, 1998). As these four participants moved through their careers, the experience of teaching at times seems like a journey, and at other times a battle.

For Pat, the idea of teaching is a battle. She is angered at the portrayal of teachers, teacher unions, and the educational climate that is in the conservative media. She feels the need to defend what teachers do and the benefits that teachers receive to the public in general and feels that is something that has gotten harder over the past several years. She seems to be in constant battle with what she teaches within the classroom. She laments the loss of autonomy to teach content, and as a passionate history teacher battles with the idea that good teaching is about preparing students to take a standardized test rather than history to prepare them for life. Abigail also sees her career as a battle, where she needs to prove herself to other teachers who question what she does in the classroom. It is important to her that her students have faith in her and she battles to have them understand her motivations and actions. Her constant competitiveness for awards and accolades within the teaching profession seem to fuel a need that she has for battle. After declaring her school is like “swimming with the sharks” she is proud to know that in that battle she can do that, and come out still standing. For her that is a revelation from her first years of teaching, because she had not realized that she could do that.

For Kevin, however, teaching is a journey. He is interested in helping students find their way. He coaches students in exploring where they currently are and where they want to be in the future, and how to get there. The idea of taking a student on a journey and moving them from Point A to Point B provides satisfaction for Kevin in what he does. When his own career path in teaching is disrupted, Kevin accepts the change, but wonders where he fits in this journey that has taken a new turn for him, and questions why he was not included in the determination of his new path. For Moana, her passion for constantly improving in how she teaches support her identity as a lifelong learner on the journey of teaching. Moana sees herself, not alone, but as a partner with her students on this journey, and her determination to provide equitable experiences for all her students propels her on this path.

As these four participants narrated their stories, there seemed to be a connection between their self-identity and their perception of what they do. For Moana and Kevin, it seems to be about constantly trying to improve their own lives and the lives of their students. The stories they narrate have a forward momentum that seems to look at what is next for their students and themselves. In contrast, Abigail and Pat perceive teaching as a battle. Their narratives speak of competitiveness and a constant striving to justify what they do, at all levels.

It is interesting to note how first teaching experiences seemed to set self-identity and perceptions of teaching on the path that these four participants find themselves on now. An encouraging, supportive first principal, and answering the call to teach after starting in another career path seem to encourage looking at teaching as a journey, where as a windowless classroom with unruly students and a change in political climate that

focused on disparaging public servants and a changing student population seems to encourage the perception of a battle. The past self seems to have predicted the now and future selves, which were influenced by the past self, with all the continuities, discontinuities and disjunctions that occurred as the identity was formed. (Hamman, Romano & Bunuan, 2010).

**Categorical classification of teacher self-identity.** The categorical classification of different teacher self-identities centered around three distinct categories: subject matter expert, didactical expert, and pedagogical expert (Beijaard, et al., 2000). For each of these four participants, there is a strong categorical classification to their self-identities that places them within one of these categories.

For Moana and Kevin, the categorical classification of their self-identity is that of a pedagogical expert. The pedagogical expert uses the profession, and the knowledge and skills that their students learn to support their social, emotional and moral development. For Moana, she not only strives to teach her students content, but she emphasizes the moral development, also.

Moana states, “Social justice is huge for me...I try to mirror all my classes like the AP classes, even as I am grading their papers, exams and projects. I look to see who has surprised me and met my expectations and is thriving, and who has not. Then I try to figure out how to get them there. Honestly, these are the tenets of what really drive my teaching.” Moana, in this narrative, challenges the notion that there should be criteria for AP classes that students need to meet to participate. She suggests that sometimes students just need to be challenged to rise to the occasion of what is offered in AP classes, and that everyone should have the opportunity to participate in those classes, regardless of test

criteria met (usually standardized test scores). When she took her students on a trip to hear a lecture about cancer and genetics, the students felt that the speaker ignored their questions during the question and answer period. Moana uses this as a real learning experience for her students. This was an AP class, so these students have the expectations of going on to prestigious colleges, many which do not have a large minority representation. She asks her students to consider what that will be like, going to a college that has a predominantly white population. She poses the question, “How will you handle it?” She wants her students to be prepared for the systemic racism they may experience in their future educational experiences careers, and has a strong sense of responsibility to help her students understand how to make others aware through appropriate responses to racism.

For Kevin, “Math is just a game that you have to play sometimes, just to kind of get through.” He has the realization that most of his students will not need complex math skills for the professions that they will enter. He tells his students, “It’s a game you have to play. You need these points to graduate, how are you going to get those points?” Kevin teaches his students that the goal is to learn math to get you somewhere, rather than learning math for the sake of learning math. This is very evident in his mentoring of the student interested in joining the program for architecture, construction and engineering. Working with another teacher, Kevin realizes that this student really belongs in the program. Even though the student does not meet the criteria, having only a 1.1 GPA, and in fact, has several serious behavior referrals for drug use, Kevin recognizes something in this student. Before allowing the student into the program, Kevin has a very frank conversation with the student, asking, “You have issues to overcome, and you have to

learn to overcome them. What do you want to do...who are you hanging around with?"

Reflective of a pedagogical expert, his discussion with the student focused very little on academic growth, and predominantly on the student's social and emotional growth. In the end the student really wanted to try, so Kevin advocated for the student's entrance into the program.

Pat's narrated stories reveal her to be the subject matter expert according to Beijaard et al. (2000). The subject matter expert bases her profession on the content that she teaches and the skills needed to learn that content as most important to students in the learning process. Her love of history drives this self-identity. For Pat, this creates a tension in how she views the structure of her school. Her narratives indicate that the purpose of school is to pass the test in her subject matter. In order to achieve this, it would be best to go back to old ways of structuring school, including tracking kids and organizing classes by academic ability, and having traditional structured classrooms with desks in rows. She states, "Well, if you have 28 kids, with 11<sup>th</sup> grade reading levels down to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading levels, with one set of hands and one pair of eyes – I'm sorry, I can't do all this differentiation..." For Pat, the ability to teach with rigor is based on the skills and knowledge of the students sitting in her classes. She states, "I'm trying to reach them where they are at, and yet expose them to a high level of rigor. I can't do that unless they bring tracking back. If you bring back tracking, it would be much easier to move people to the next level..." For Pat, being a subject matter expert is most important in preparing students to take the state tests, but she finds that she is thwarted in this effort due to the ability levels of her students.

Abigail's categorical classification of teacher self-identity is that of the didactical expert. The didactical expert is concerned with the planning, execution and evaluation of teaching and learning processes. Abigail narrates that the planning of her lessons has a very structured framework, for everything that she teaches. Her lessons are framed within the context of activities for pre-reading, activities during the reading process, and activities after the reading process. This framework has not varied since she started student teaching and has applied to all the various levels that she has taught: elementary, middle school and high school. When faced with her first teaching experience with a student population that was diverse, Abigail realizes she does not have any experience in her background to understand this. When students are able to articulate and point out to her that she is favoring the white kids in the classroom, she is willing to do whatever she needs to do to understand that deficiency in her teaching, and correct it. She states, "When I became aware of it...through a lot of reading, and forming some professional and personal relationships, I kind of did an official black studies minor on my own, and it really helped."

Beijaard et al. (2000) acknowledge that the observed identity formation of categorical classifications of teachers is an ongoing process with constant interpretation and reinterpretations as the teacher experiences life. However, the formation of the types of categorical classifications is rooted in the participant's inherited moral sources and is revealed through their classroom practice (Coldron & Smith, 1999). For Moana, her beginnings of wanting to be in a service oriented profession influence her social justice and equality stances, creating a good fit for the pedagogical expert. Kevin's ability to coach students through difficult conversations also rings true for helping students grow

emotionally and socially, not just academically, and this also is a good fit for the pedagogical expert. Pat's intense focus on getting students to pass the test in history, and her love of history guides her understanding as the subject matter expert, just as Abigail's understanding of teaching, learned during student teaching in first grade, guides her practice in the classroom, regardless of the age of the students. This reveals Abigail to be the didactical expert focused on supporting students through the implementation of the learning process.

### **Research Question Two, Part B – Support and Complications**

*What discontinuities or disjunctions in work trajectories are narrated in classroom experiences that support, complicate or contradict a teacher's self-identity?*

Mishler (1999) explored craftartists self-identity through the idea of dialogic-self theory. The individual's identity, or "lifetime work trajectory" was explored through the narratives that his participants told. These narratives reflected different and conflicting forces that added support, discontinuity or disjunction to individual lives. Within the classroom itself, these participants shared narratives that demonstrate the empowerment they feel in working with students. However, in the external context outside the four walls of the classroom, participants share narratives that speak to the discontinuities and disjunctions that create skepticism around the legislative mandates and district goals. These forces cause a confusion and disbelief in the self-identity that these teachers have formed, and in several cases causes them to question what they are doing in those internal contexts. At the very least, they seem to call into question the complicating of the self-identity.

Table 1.

Self-Identity and Expert Type

Name	Self-Identity	Categorical Classification*
Moana	Life Long Learner	Pedagogical Expert (Social/Emotional Growth)
Kevin	Coach	Pedagogical Expert
Pat	History Department Chair	Subject Matter Expert (Content Growth)
Abigail	Competitor	Didactical Expert (Implementation of Learning)

\* *Note.* Categorical Classifications are based on Biejaard et al. (2000)

**Complications and contradictions: Secret stories.** Clandinin and Connelly (1996) in their research around teacher narratives determined that within the boundary spaces that teachers lived and worked were three types of narrated stories: sacred stories, cover stories and secret stories. The sacred stories were the stories teachers narrated that espoused the public values and beliefs of the district. The cover stories were the stories teachers narrated that indicated compliance with the espoused values and beliefs of the district. The secret stories, however, were more private stories that teachers narrated to help reconcile the tension that was created by the sacred stories of district emphasis with individual teacher beliefs and self-identity.

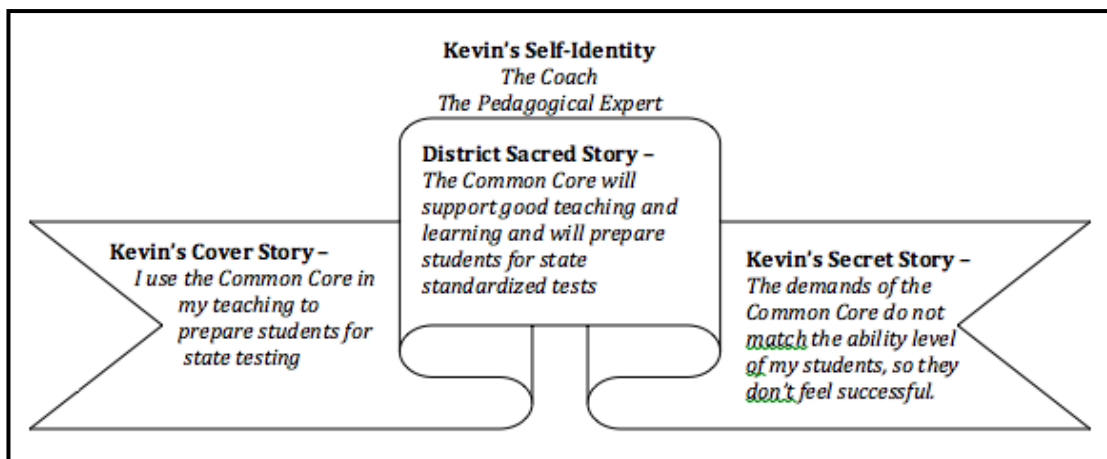
In the narratives of Kevin and Pat, very clear indications of the three types of stories can be seen. Within Pat's self-identity as the history department chair, the sacred story reflecting publicly stated district beliefs that she needs to communicate to the teachers in her department is around a data accountability procedure designed at the state level to increase student performance on the state mandated standardized tests. In Pat's state, districts that have a consistent failure to meet benchmark standards are required by



law to participate in this data accountability procedure. Pat's cover story with her department is that in regards to the procedure, her department works hard to determine how the conversations that they have in weekly meeting fit into the required form that they have to fill out. Pat's secret story, though, is her personal belief that the entire process is, as she put it, "a colossal waste of time." She states, "I'm trying to play happy, good little soldier, but I can't sell something I don't believe in." The metaphor of the *happy little soldier* suggests that Pat is desperately trying to reconcile what she is required to do as the history department chair, but cannot fully comply due to her lack of faith in what is being asked of her. She again has this same struggle around differentiation in the classroom. Her district's sacred story mandates that all teachers use differentiation in their teaching. Pat's cover story suggesting compliance with district policies is that she tries to do differentiation, but sometimes she does not see it working for her. The secret story contradicts the district's sacred story - she does not believe that differentiation is something that works in the classroom. Differentiation is perplexing to Pat. She does not understand how students at varying reading levels can all be in the same classroom. Her self-identity as a subject matter expert tells her that students who are at below grade reading levels will not be able to understand her history content. Yet the district sacred story is to use differentiation to meet the students at their current levels. She states, "I want them (the district) to prove to me that differentiation works. Why don't they, in my opinion, just level the classes. I want some data that proves all this stuff they're saying, works."

For Kevin, the sacred stories work against his self-identity as a coach, and the pedagogical expert in him is challenged when his voice is not heard in district

management decisions. The sacred story is that technology is important to the district. Kevin's cover story is acceptance of the elimination of his position as a technology coach and placement back in the classroom as a math teacher. He states, "You want me to teach these kids? Okay. It's challenging but I'll do it." The secret story, however, reveals the interruption in Kevin's self-identity as a coach. He explains, "What matters now is they have a structure... It's like there's this huge loss, this huge void. It's kind of like, where does Kevin fit?" Kevin's self-identity is clearly misplaced in the new structure, and Kevin's secret story is that he is not respected for what he feels he brings to the students and staff as a technology coach. Again, Kevin's self-identity as a coach and as a pedagogical expert is challenged when the district tells the sacred story of their support of good teaching and learning through the use of the Common Core in preparation for standardized state tests (see Figure 8).



**Figure 8.** Kevin's Stories. An illustration of sacred, cover, and secret stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996).

Kevin's cover story speaks to how he uses the Common Core to guide what he does in his classroom, and follows the recommended pacing guides. His secret story, though, speaks to the confusion he feels when he cannot reconcile the demands of the

Common Core as a curriculum with the ability of the students to feel successful. He explains, “When you put those demands (of the Common Core), coupled by the fact that we have kids that are so far behind, it’s difficult to pace yourself at any kind of pace and still have students feel successful about themselves.” Kevin has a belief that the structures the state has put in place for teaching and learning (i.e., the Common Core) are not realistic for urban districts that he feels have students who are working with significant deficits.

It is interesting to note that the sacred, cover and secret stories that are recognizable in Kevin’s and Pat’s narratives, do not seem to be as clearly defined in Moana’s and Abigail’s narratives. While elements of the sacred story are found, for example the idea of that all students will graduate and go to college, there do not seem to be the cover and secret stories needed to reconcile a clashing with self-identities. This could be for several reasons.

First, the identities of Moana and Abigail are identities that allow for fluidity and an evolving process of learning and developing. Moana being a lifelong learner, and Abigail being a competitor, suggest that their identities are always moving on to the next thing that is going to support their teaching and learning. This may suggest, that when discontinuities like district sacred stories arise, they are not as affected by the story because they see teaching as a constantly evolving process. Moana explains, “...if I’m reading this book, what lens do I read it with? How do I bring it to my students, and what can I take from this book? I think those are the skills that you have either been cultivated to have or you naturally have them. I believe that my personal ability has been groomed.” She later in the same story continues with the idea of change as she explains, “It’s

understanding that I don't have all the answers and it is okay not to have all the answers, and you should be constantly changing, because change is not a bad thing because you are changing to get better." For Abigail, her self-identity is rooted in her competitive nature. She is constantly seeking out new experiences and committee work that takes her outside of the building she works in and affords her the opportunity to be recognized for the work that she does. She explains, "I look for district opportunities to be professional, like the master teacher committee, being a resident professional development facilitator, and working with third year teachers in the new teacher program." These self-identities suggest a stark contrast to Kevin's self-identity as a coach and Pat's self-identity as the history department chair.

Second, Moana and Abigail both seem to feel, that while they work in an urban school district, the experience at their magnet school for science is not the typical urban experience. Abigail explains, "I definitely don't have the "typical" urban experience. I've never had to really worry about remediation on a wide scale. I've always dealt with average or above average kids, which I know is not typical. I know that I am spoiled." For Abigail, the typical urban experience seems to include extensive remediation, and working with below average students. Interestingly, her typical urban experience seems to deal with academics and not behaviors. While Moana does not believe that she has the typical urban experience either, she does acknowledge that her students do have typical urban behaviors. But being an advocate for her students, she works to help them understand the skills that they will need to be successful in the world, like her reaction to the perceived racism her students experienced at the genetics and cancer symposium. Kevin and Pat, by contrast, seem to feel that their schools are the "typical" urban

experience, in both academics and behavior. It is interesting to note that all four teachers express the idea that there is a stereotypical urban experience.

Third, it appears that when Abigail and Moana are faced with sacred stories that they do not buy in to, rather than create cover and secret stories, they determine it is time to move on and find new positions in places where the sacred story is different. Moana explains her reasons behind leaving her first school, where she had created a culture of project based learning for her students in the classroom. She states, “Then, you know, the administration changed and the people coming in really didn’t get it. Then there were people who didn’t really like that we would take kids out of school for these projects. So it was like, “You’re not going to do that anymore.’ So I started to think about that idea that I didn’t know if I could stay there anymore.” The following year, Moana left for her current position. Abigail explains that she left her school that she loved working in when her administration changed also. She states, “We would have book clubs and we would work together. You know, it was middle school, and it was when the middle school teaming concept was in, so we met every day as a team. I know I have been lucky because I have only had two principals in my career, and the reason I left that middle school is because my principal retired.”

Finally, it is interesting to note that Kevin and Pat not only have spent their whole careers as teachers in the same district that they are in now, they both grew up and attended the schools where they now teach. Except for the four or five years they were away at college, they have been privy to their districts’ sacred stories for their entire educational lives, both as students and teachers. There appears to be something in their self-identity that called them to teach where they grew up. When the sacred stories of

their districts changed, Kevin and Pat seemed to find it harder to reconcile those changes with their self-identities, and as a result needed to create those cover and secret stories to make it seem as if they were complying with sacred story. Moana and Abigail, not having that lifelong development of self-identity in the same environment, do not seem to feel the need to create cover and secret stories to reconcile the sacred stories of their district with their self-identity.

**The inauthenticity of teacher evaluation.** Alsup's (2006) idea of preservice teachers being conflicted by opposing forces that were found in the experiences of student teaching can be applied as a lens in which to look at these four participants disruption in self-identity through the teacher evaluation process. For all of these participants, four years ago marked the beginning of a new era of teacher evaluation. A state wide teacher evaluation system was legislated, and out of it came an evaluation system that measured teacher effectiveness on both the meeting of standards observed in the classroom, and student growth measure on standardized testing. While Moana and Abigail's district received special legislation to design its own teacher evaluation plan, it closely mirrors what the rest of the state is implementing. It is interesting to note, though, that Moana and Abigail both believe that their district's teacher evaluation system is much more arduous and rigorous than the state's teacher evaluation system.

For Pat, teacher evaluation has become, what she calls, "a dog and pony show" where teachers perform for their evaluator twice a year to achieve high rankings. "It's just ridiculous. Anyone can put on a dog and pony show and they do. There are bad teachers who twice a year do differentiation. It's just waste and stress." She feels that the system is designed for administration to penalize teachers, and suggests that bad teachers

are often ranked as good teachers by “performing” the two lessons that are observed by the administration. Her narrative indicates that evaluation is hard work, and she wonders at working so hard to get the highest rating on the evaluation rubric- “accomplished.” According to Pat, it seems that even when teachers work really hard for that rating, it is not attainable. The teacher ranking drops to “skilled” – the next ranking down from “accomplished” - due to factors such as the administration not being allowed to “give out” too many accomplished ratings. In addition, “accomplished” ratings also can drop due to a district’s shared attribution of student test scores. In shared attribution, if the district student average for growth is low on standardized tests, every teacher shares responsibility for that and is marked low, regardless of how their individual students may have scored, resulting in a “skilled ranking” overall.

Kevin draws a very strong line of distinction between *teaching* and *learning*. He feels in the current educational climate there is an assumption that if there is good teaching going on in the classroom, there will automatically be good learning. Kevin states strongly that this is a false assumption, and to use student learning as a measure of good teaching is not authentic. He explains, “When I look at it in retrospect, I had two kids in my observations last year that didn’t care. What am I supposed to do with those kids? So during my observation my administrator mentions, ‘This person was off task, this person was just chilling.’ Okay – they do that every period. What’s that got to do with my teaching?” Kevin feels there needs to be adjustments in the teacher evaluation system that take into account students who are just not motivated. He should be given the opportunity to explain children who are unmotivated, share what he has tried to do with them to get them motivated, and then when the administrator comes in to observe, focus

only on the students who are participating in the lesson. For Kevin, this would make teacher evaluation more authentic and true to the issues that he faces as an urban educator.

For Abigail, teacher evaluation is like “the lottery.” It is inauthentic because it all depends on which particular class of students the teacher chooses for participation in the student growth measures. She seems to pushback against the idea that the student test scores are the ultimate measure of student preparedness for demonstrating skills and college readiness. She also levels critique against the idea that the statistical process for measuring student growth is not shared with her and she has no say in what or how it is measured. She explains, “They (the district) set the test, they set and target, and we have no choice in that. You are not allowed to move it. It’s like it takes it back to God.” She has distrust in the validity of the standardized test and the statistical processes that are used to evaluate student growth. In previous years, she has carefully tried to evaluate each of her classes to choose the class that would give her the best results in terms of student growth, and each year she feels she picks the wrong class, just reinforcing her idea that it is like “the lottery.”

For Moana, there is the big question of the purpose of teacher evaluation. When her district first implemented the teacher evaluation model, Moana was selected to provide professional development to other teachers, and at first was very excited about the new system. The evaluation plan that she “loved” at the beginning of the story, for her has now turned into something that is negative and used to penalize and punish teachers. She explains that the district evaluation process, “made it very easy...because I loved that it wasn’t going to be, ‘Ha! You suck!’ It was ‘Hey, let’s develop you. Let’s figure out



what your strengths and weaknesses are. What does your student data tell you? Where can we grow from that?’ It was all above board and very open.” This past year, she states that evaluation is, “like ‘sink or swim, figure it out on your own.’ That changed the whole dynamic, because now it isn’t about the D (development) anymore, is it? It’s about the E (evaluation), and so everyone is completely at this hyper level of, ‘All you want to do is nail me and fire me.’”

The current models of teacher evaluation all focus on the idea of using evaluation to support teacher professional development. Danielson (2008) suggests that it is through evaluation that a teacher can be provided with support in areas where she is weak, and can then help others through areas that she is strong. It is a collaborative model based on a set of standards focused on instruction, assessment, collaboration and collegiality, and suggests teachers be evaluated to improve teaching and learning. Many district and state systems across the country adopted this model and created evaluation systems that did focus on evaluation for teacher improvement rather than evaluation for punitive measures. Most teacher evaluation systems, in addition to the standards based teacher evaluation system, also included student growth measures as an integral part of teacher evaluation. In the context of teacher evaluation, it is assumed that what the teacher does in the classroom in terms of instructional strategies used to deliver content will influence how much growth a student shows within a year. In the state where these four participants live, the district has the choice to determine how much weight the standards based evaluation and the student growth measure, have on the final summative teacher rating.

It is the combination of these two measures that have created an interruption in the self-identity of these four participants with regards to teacher evaluation. It is interesting to note that, for each participant, the area of teacher evaluation that is blamed for inauthenticity by the participant is an area that directly relates to his or her self-identity. For Pat, the history department chair, teacher evaluation becomes a show, that teachers who she deems ineffective are able to “perform” their way to ratings that seemingly demonstrate effectiveness. Pat is offended that this is allowed to happen. For Kevin, the coach, what is evaluated when observed by his administration is not what he values. The teaching of content itself, which is what his administrators are focusing on, does not include the support both emotionally and socially that Kevin feels is vital to the growth of his students. For Kevin, it is not about what he teaches in regards to the content in his classroom, rather how he help students achieve their goals in life. While his administrator focuses on two students who are *not* engaged in Kevin’s lesson, Kevin feels slighted when the administrator does not acknowledge what Kevin has done for all the other students who *have* engaged. For Abigail, her self-identity as a competitor is challenged when she perceives that the control of her ranking is taken out of her hands, and rests on the choosing of the best class to evaluate for student growth measures. Because the choosing of the class resembles the idea of “the lottery,” Abigail is forced to take her chance with the class, rather than relying on her own confidence and competence for student growth. For Moana, the lifelong learner, feedback must be provided for her to understand how she can improve her instructional practice and for teacher evaluation to be authentic. The lack of conversation around improvement based on her observed

practices in the classroom has left her dissatisfied with the whole process, and leads to the determination that evaluation is for the firing of those teacher estimated ineffective.

**Supports.** Teacher self-identity is rooted in the classroom practice of the teachers along with the moral sources that have been inherited through family values and work experience (Coldron & Smith, 1999). It is through these inherited moral sources that self-identity can be supported and reinforced in daily work. For each of the participants, these supports took on various formations, but at the core seemed to all be internal forces that supported their work with students within the four walls of the classroom.

For Moana, the supports for her self-identity are the things that she states are “hills I am willing to die on.” These hills are a commitment to her students around equity of resources, equity of her time, and equity of expectations. The foundation of what she does in the classroom is based on these ideas which she feels fall within the realm of social justice. Moana’s self-identity of a lifelong learner is supported by the knowledge and belief in herself that she strives to meet this tenet for every student she teaches, regardless of academic ability. She explains, “I really do believe that sometimes the students need the challenge and support of those expectations in the Advanced Placement classes to know what they *could* achieve, and so I think that the social justice and equity component is something that I really do.”

For Pat, self-identity is supported through her sense of belonging in the school where she teaches. It is interesting to note, when Pat was asked about her sense of belonging in the school, she emphatically states, “I grew up here, I went here, and I lived here until I was 27. It’s as much my school as anybody in that building. It doesn’t deal with anybody. I belong here, it’s my school.” It was almost as if the idea of asking her the

question was insulting, because the answer should have been obvious. Teaching in the exact building she grew up in built a very strong connection to the school, which supports Pat in her daily teaching. Her love of history has propelled her to the self-identity of history department chair, which reinforce her belief that she belongs in the school. This can also justify her anger at her district when change becomes apparent, or when the district tries to implement a change in practice that is not agreeable to Pat.

For Abigail, support for her self-identity comes in the confidence she has in her own ability as a teacher. While Abigail perceived other teachers trying to disrupt her self-identity of who she was in the classroom by encouraging her students to doubt her ability to provide a high quality education, Abigail pushed back. She explains, “I told them (her students) there is no right or wrong way to teach in English, and anyone that tells you there is, lies...I’ve worked very, very hard to prove my competence...Like I tell the kids, I don’t really care what anyone else thinks.” Abigail’s confidence in her own ability to be competitive and “win” the game of teaching supports her self-identity as a competitor.

For Kevin, self-identity is supported through his ability to mentor and support students, especially in his engineering club after school. He explains, “I love the way practitioners from various engineering professions are coming in and talking to the students. They are mentors for the students as they move towards the goal of the whole project, which is community.” It is not only Kevin’s own mentoring that supports what he does in the classroom, but also his connections with practitioners out in the “real world” that allow for him to provide experiences for his students from outside the classroom.

**Supports and complications at the same time.** Just as with preservice teachers, emotion conflicted with the teaching and caring of students, that then led to the

complication in the formation of self-identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). While in some instances participants were very similar in the ideas behind the categories that conflict and support self-identity, there were several categories where participant views contradicted each other. Two such categories were those of family, specifically becoming a parent, and professional development.

**Becoming a parent.** For Pat, becoming a parent brought awareness of how she treats and interacts with students in her classroom on a daily basis. She explains, “I have two children, and I guess I look at each kid...and what has guided me for the last 10 years is the questions, ‘What if that were my kid?’ Before I had kids I still did this, but I never put it in this context.” For Pat awareness increases when she has her own children. She worries when things do not go right with students in the classroom, but does her best to make sure issues with students do not escalate out of control. Pat feels that her outward compassion has changed, and that the idea of a teacher mistreating her child makes her realize the significance of how she treats the students in her classroom.

For Kevin, a child subjected to state standardized testing creates an intersection between his teacher identity and his parent identity. He explains, “My daughter is in the third grade, and had to take the state test that has to be passed to move to the fourth grade...I asked her, ‘How’d you do?’” She answered, “I guess okay. I’m afraid of not going to the fourth grade.’ What third grader at the beginning of the year should be afraid of not going to fourth grade? It makes no sense.” As a teacher, Kevin seemed to support teachers’ efforts to make sure that students were ready to take the test. There was no evident pushback against the testing environment in his role as a teacher. When Kevin’s own daughter is now subjected to the testing environment, that teacher identity intersects

with what Kevin believes is good for his own daughter, and is frustrated that at the beginning of her third grade year, she is already worried she will not make it to fourth grade. While Kevin's teacher identity has never been fully supportive of the testing environment, it is when his own daughter is affected that he actually takes an active parental voice against the testing movement, complicating his teacher identity.

For Moana, having children complicated her self-identity as a teacher in the allocation of time commitment to her students at school. When her children were both under the age of three, she was very involved in extracurricular activities in her building. She explains, "So at that point I was the senior class advisor, I was the student council advisor, I was the girls' tennis coach, I was the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade team leader, and I was teaching three preps. There were a lot of balls up in the air." Moana had been asked to attend a meeting for prom planning during one of her classes, and she wrote on the board that the students had a workday, and that they needed to get things done. Moana acknowledges that this was probably not the most productive use of time for her students, but she felt that she did not have a choice. After the meeting the principal called her aside and told her that she was only paid to do one thing: teach. Moana struggled with being told that, to the point she was very angry and that she cried over it, but eventually realized that she was trying to do too much. Now, Moana is very careful with her time, and is especially protective of time with her children. Her school currently has Saturday School, a chance for students to catch up on work. Moana explains, "Kids are always asking me if I'm coming and I say no. They ask why and I tell them because Saturday for me is the most precious day of the week. I can make breakfast, watch cartoons. I'm not leaving my family to come here to work. That was very challenging for me." While hard

for Moana, she realizes that equity of time includes finding time to spend with her family, even if this does conflict with her teacher self-identity.

Becoming parents for teachers both supports and complicates the teacher self-identity. It is easier to follow federal, state and district mandates that a teacher disagrees with when it is only affecting the students sitting in his classroom. When those mandates now affect a personal relationship, a teacher's own child, conflicts arise. The teacher identity has tension with personal beliefs of what is best for the teacher's child and what has to be done as a teacher in the system. The intersection of teacher self-identity and parent self-identity create a space that sometimes forces the teacher to give up what she may have believed in, for the sake of her own family.

**Professional development.** Teacher participation, and the expectation of participation in professional development can both support and contradict a teacher's self-identity. The determining factor seems to be the teacher's attitude toward the professional development that is being offered. Whether or not the professional development is deemed advantageous, inadequate, or an imposition determines how a teacher receives the learning session.

For Kevin, professional development is an imposition when he is asked to participate in training for a science lab, while another teacher is asked to attend training for a robotics program. This bothers Kevin because he feels that the district did not take into account the interests of the two teachers. He explains, "In essence, if they would have asked, I should be doing that (robotics) and he (another teacher) should be doing the science lab. He is so science and I am so hands on robotic stuff...But because they just assumed...Where's our input?" The confusion Kevin feels at not being asked his opinion

conflicts with his self-identity of a coach. In his coaching style, Kevin wants to know where his students are and where they want to be. He then works with them to figure out the best pathway to get there. The district however, does not ask Kevin for his input, and decides for him where they want him to be, as well as the other teacher. The professional development that is provided for Kevin to get there becomes meaningless to Kevin, because he was not asked if that was where he wanted to be in the first place.

For Abigail, staff development becomes a support that helps her achieve success in her competitive driven self-identity, though, what she deems to be professional development does not seem to directly support what she does in the classroom. Abigail explains her need for professional development by stating, “The place I work right now is very competitive...Other than my team members, I don’t really trust anyone at that school...I look for district opportunities to be professional, like the master teacher committee, being a resident professional development facilitator, and working with third year teachers in the new teacher program.” Abigail uses professional development at the district level as way to fulfill her need to be competitive. She gets involved in the district level committees that allow her to share her knowledge, and gain the accolades that she needs to support her self-identity. In addition, Abigail seeks out learning situations when she is unsure of what to do in the classroom. When faced with diversity for the first time in her teaching, she seeks out advice from colleagues and spends time learning on her own how she can respond to diverse student populations. She is motivated by her competitive nature to train herself so that she appears as a competent teacher to her students.



For Moana, her self-identity of a lifelong learner corresponds with professional development. Her constant reflection on her practice and her belief in change for the better, results in her seeking professional development, whether it is in the form of a district led class, a university class or just reading a book that gives her a better idea of what to do in the classroom. Moana narrates that she used to accept assignments from students whenever it was finished, but as the number of courses that she taught increased, she began to struggle with how to manage that. She explains, “I would just be so stressed with all the grading, and really felt like I wasn’t doing justice to the assignments. So I read a book about grading fixes that helps you to assess kids without everything counting for points.” Moana, on her own, was able to diagnose the frustration that she was having, find a book to support her problem, and change the way that she evaluated students in her classroom based on what she had learned from that book. Moana finds professional development, whether formal or informal as something valuable to help her in her classroom practice.

In Moana’s opinion, professional development is the answer to teacher improvement in the classroom. However, she recognizes that not all teachers are receptive to professional development. Whether professional development is viewed as helpful, inadequate or an imposition depends on where the teacher is in his professional career. Moana suggests that there are two kinds of teachers. The first teacher is reflective and is able to adapt his or her practice. This teacher is open to change, and sees change as a good thing, because change means that his instructional practice is getting better. The second teacher is the person who believes that he has already learned everything that he needs to know about his instructional practice. He went to school to become a teacher,

and she suggests that his attitude is that what he has learned now just needs to be implemented. She explains, "...to that person, the mindset is they've already reached the end of what they need to know. And when professional development is suggested, this person is kind of offended because they have already learned what they need to know to be a teacher."

Pat seems to exemplify Moana's suggestion when she is asked to attend the data accountability in-service about evaluating the forms that teachers have to fill out to complete the process. She is frustrated that she has to attend because she cannot connect the value of filling out this form with what she does in the classroom. The same situation arises for Pat when she is asked to observe other teachers for classroom rigor. It does not seem to occur to her that this could be used as an informal professional development discussion among her colleagues to improve instructional practice by increasing rigor. It seems her understanding of this task is that her district has asked her to evaluate other teachers, because of a perceived weakness in instructional practice, and for her that goes against union contract. She is offended that her principal would even ask her to do something like that. For this type of teacher, Moana states, "...the need to be professionally developed is perceived as being weak in the eyes of other teachers. These teachers believe that the only teachers who really need professional development are the bad ones."

### **Research Question Three - Teacher / Student Interactions**

*How might a teacher's narrated self-identity influence his or her interactions with students?*

As adults enter the seventh stage of Erikson's (1950) stages of development, they recognize the value in passing on what has been learned to the next generation. This stage, known as generativity versus stagnation creates an adult self-identity that is either defined by mentoring or self-centeredness. Dwek's (2006) ideas around mindset being either fixed or growth also impact self-identity. For a teacher self-identity, having either a growth mindset or a fixed mindset can impact how he interacts with the students sitting in his classroom.

**Participant's beliefs about students.** Pat believes that there are two kinds of students that are currently sitting in her classroom. She explains, "So I have those kids, those middle class kids, whose parents want them to do well and they realize that education is the way to get there. The other kids I have are those low income kids, who are getting some type of entitlement program and assume that everyone is getting some type of entitlement program." For Pat, socio-economic status plays into how she perceives the students sitting in her classroom. She perceives that students from low income families are hard to motivate because they do not understand that hard work in the educational process now will pay off later in life. She suggests that these students themselves have a "fixed mindset." She explains, "They don't get it. You know, it's, 'I'm dumb. I'm stupid. If I study it doesn't matter.' They don't even try, and that is my struggle." While she says her students from low income families articulate that they want to become lawyers and doctors, she perceives that they do not understand what that requires in terms of the educational career. She feels that poor vocabulary leads to an inability to write comprehensively, and that this is why these students perform poorly on state standardized tests. Her students from middle class families, while understanding the

value of education, are perceived by Pat to still have deficiencies, and that the students sitting in her honors classes have changed. She explains, "It's not the same honors I taught 10 years ago. Basically, my honors now is college prep, I mean that's the reality. If I were to teach like I taught 10 years ago I would have 10 kids pass, I'm not joking."

Both Kevin and Pat agree that students today are only interested in what is happening outside the environment that they are currently sitting in, and that technology plays a significant role in how their students manage that desire. He states, "My students think about whatever is happening on SnapChat and whatever is going on right now in someone else's world, because they do not really want to be where they currently are." Kevin states that all students sitting in his classroom today are emotional and do not have enough curiosity to engage in the learning process. He states, "I wish I had more curious kids, you know, as to how things work and why."

All four participants narrate ideas of a disconnect between students wanting a good education and understanding what it takes to achieve this goal. While Pat focuses on income being the problem for this disconnect, Kevin and Moana see this disconnect being around the grading system. Kevin states, "I have kids that dream of doing something, but they just have no idea how to get there. They're just told to do certain things more out of compliance than anything. Like what does a grade really translate to, why do they need certain grades?" For Kevin, there is a disconnect between student goals and the grade that he assigns. For Moana the disconnect is around the difference for students between learning for a grade, and learning for life. Moana states, "I work in a place where the students are very point driven, where everything is, 'Give me points.' As they matriculate and move into this world, I'm not sure that points give them the skill set

of just doing things because you need to do them.” For Abigail, the disconnect comes from the message that the students are indoctrinated within her school building. She explains, “They (the students) know they want to do well, they know they want to go to the best colleges, but I don’t think they know why...I think sometimes they’re fed a storyline and they don’t necessarily pushback on it in the sense that they are able to come up with an alternative plan.” Abigail perceives her students articulating the message of her school, but not really understanding the impact of that on their personal lives. She explains, “...some of them (her students) get to college and are changing their majors and transferring and wasting time and money. There wasn’t any alternative path thought out beforehand.”

For Abigail, there is a perception that her students are intrinsically motivated, and genuinely want to please teachers and parents. She states that in her school, “it is cool to be smart,” and perceives that extrinsically motivates her students. A negative extrinsic motivation on her students, according to Abigail, is their work ethic, although she does admit that it seems heavily influenced by the demands the teaching staff places on students. She explains, “...some nights they have way too much homework, to the point where the kids tell me they worked until 2:00am. It’s ridiculous. I think part of the problem is that they don’t work effectively, but part of the problem is that they receive too much homework.”

It is interesting to note how factors such as socio-economic status, knowledge, and skills contribute to these four participants’ perceptions of the students they teach. Earlier, it was noted that they all had expressed the idea that there is a “typical” experience that teachers have when working with urban populations. For Moana and

Abigail the student population that they work with has an exclusive set of knowledge and skills due the strict academic achievement guidelines and student selection process.

Rigorous vetting of their students through an application process provides for a unique student experience for Abigail and Moana, and could strongly influence their personal beliefs about students.

**Connection to self-identity.** The classroom has become the place where knowledge is transmitted between teacher and student (Hanley, 2006). Issues arise, though when teachers are ill equipped or untrained in how to help students. The teachers, who ignored the hidden curriculum or used pedantic, rote learning and tests, used these methods to try and control students within the classroom to avoid situations that were ambiguous and uncomfortable. The teacher's belief about the students that were sitting in his classroom greatly influenced how that teacher interacted with the students.

Whether a teacher sees the classroom as a space of agency and power, or as a space of control and rote learning, depends on the teacher's self-identity. In the case of Pat, her self-identity as a subject matter expert and history department chair, lend itself to her views about her students. Pat seems to struggle with the changing population of today, from 10 years ago. Her discovery that having the desks in rows allowed her to better control her students, and her questioning of differentiation, speak to a time in education when the factory model worked best in preparing students for the workplace. Pat wants control of the content that she teaches in her classroom and how she teaches it to best prepare her students for the future. She perceives, though, that she has to teach to the test to prepare her students to attain scores adequate to graduate. Her self-identity as a teacher is threatened when she does not understand why the district does not level her

classes based on reading ability. She seems to believe that this would support her in teaching students the content needed for the test. Pat suggests that her methods of discipline and classroom structure are based on an in-service that she took 15 years ago. During this in-service she learned that, "...students who are in poverty, the lower socio-economic rung of the ladder, they need structure and they need discipline." For Pat, the structure of her classroom should come from having like ability students in the same classroom that is traditionally structured with desks in rows.

For Moana, the disconnect between learning for a grade and learning for life clash with her self-identity of a lifelong learner. She is frustrated with students who copy work and do not take time to internalize new information. She had a former student talk to her current students after taking a practice Advanced Placement exam in Biology. Her students were upset that they had not scored higher on the essay portion. Moana had tried to explain to them that the point of the essay question was to answer the actual essay question, not just write down everything they knew about the topic in an effort to get "some" points. She stated that her former student said to her current students, "I need you to know that if you are not going to spend the time to actually understand what she's asking you, and if all you're trying to do is copy it so that you can turn it in to get the points, don't bother. You already have the points." Moana reinforces this by saying he is right, she does just give points for the completion of some assignments. Her classroom is a space of power and agency, where her goal is to prepare students for the life that they will have after high school – college. Information acquisition must be internalized to support the students in becoming lifelong learners themselves, where learning is used to build on knowledge both previously learned and yet to be learned.

For Kevin, the disconnect between grades and students' future lives also creates tension with his self-identity as a coach. His goal is to help students understand what they want to do with their lives. As a coach, Kevin wants to help them find the pathway to achieve their goals, but questions the role that grades have in that pathway. Rather than focusing on the concepts of math for the sake of learning math, Kevin is more attuned to using math as a way to learn problem solving skills. He states that he tells his students, "You will probably never use an inverse in real life, but if I can get you to *think* like an inverse, and *think* what to do, that's the closest I can get to helping you out." For Kevin, the classroom space is used for helping students to grow socially and emotionally, the pedagogical identity. His classroom is also a place of agency and power to help his students realize their potential beyond the four walls of the classroom.

Abigail's self-identity also influences her interaction with her students, and creates a classroom agency that is focused on her competitive nature. Abigail believes in the power of natural consequences. She states, "I'll take late work, and I won't take any points off, but I'll say, 'Guys, you're setting yourselves up to be crummy adults, you're going to pay a lot of money in late fees...' Even with cheating, I say to my students, 'Yeah, I know you're cheating, but you're going to flunk out of college, you're going to take a \$20,000 vacation, and then you are going to come home.'" Abigail's classroom is a place to learn what the financial consequences of life are going to be through the structures of school. Abigail strives to teach her students that late work equals late fees for late bills, and that cheating causes a loss of tuition money when universities apply academic codes of honor. For Abigail, life's natural consequences weed out those



competitors who are not appropriate for the real world, so Abigail tries to reinforce this to her students in her classroom.

**Relationships.** Despite the differences in power and agency that each of the four participants have within the classroom, and despite the differences in self-identity, there was one student interaction that all four participants agreed on as being vital: building relationships. This supports the research that Giles et al. (2012) determined was at the core of classroom interaction. The idea that teachers and students were “always in a relationship,” and how teachers behaved determined how students behaved, and that those interactions are at the heart of the educational experience is a realization that seems to be narrated by Pat, Kevin, Moana and Abigail.

Pat explains, “I develop relationships, I think, with my sense of humor. I genuinely like them (my students) and I think that they know I genuinely like my job. I’m happy to be here, and the days that I’m not they don’t know it. And I show interest.” Pat narrates that she understands the importance of not taking things personally and uses humor to build relationships with her students. She states that she likes to deal with behavior issues on her own rather than bringing in administration through the referral process to deal with discipline. She states, “I don’t hold grudges, and I have a good sense of humor. I let the kids have a good sense of humor. If they get off track, that’s okay as long as I can reel it back in.” Pat determines that there is “a fine line” between having humor with her students and still maintaining classroom control. It is in this space that she seems to feel that she is able to build her relationships with her students.

For Kevin, relationships are built around his connecting with his students on a personal level. Kevin explains, “You know, things like where they want to be in the

future, what their aspirations are.” He feels that relationships with students are made stronger through knowledge and understanding of students’ capabilities. Kevin explains the relationships between himself and one of his brighter students. “I think that because he knows that I know what he knows, it helps drive him a little bit. It shows that the teacher does kind of care about him.” It is in this nurturing, caring space, that Kevin is able to build relationships with students. Kevin acknowledges that building relationships in this manner is a time consuming process, and feels fortunate that, because of his science lab duties, he only has a total of 45 students. He questions how teachers who have larger class loads of 100 can possibly manage building relationships with all those students.

For Moana, student input and connections to the real world create spaces for her to build relationships with her students. She explains, “I see them (her students) as a person first, and then realizing that our relationship to work together is so important. Then always remembering that tomorrow we will have to do it again.” Moana emphasizes a philosophy that everyone is human, and this is what strengthens her ability to build relationships. Relationships are strengthened within her classroom when her students are afforded the opportunity to witness how she handles individual cases of discipline problems. Her ability to build a relationship with one student, witnessed by all her students, gives her credibility. And for Moana, this is important so that she can teach and the children can learn, understanding that this relationship is not just for a day, but for the whole school year.

For Abigail, not being a hard disciplinarian creates the space in which she builds relationships. She explains, “I am very relationship driven. I’m not a hard ass. I’m not a

disciplinarian, and I think to try and be one would just set myself up for a lot of problems. I always say I am a person of 567 chances with the kids..." To build relationships, Abigail uses specific strategies with the students. She states, "The first thing that I do is make sure that I know everybody's name within the first week of school. Then I find opportunities to have small conversations. Sharing of writing that is opinion based and group discussions, along with conversations are all vehicles to build relationships." Abigail pushes outside the four walls of the classroom by getting her students involved in programs that extend what they are doing within the classroom. Programs such as multicultural read-ins at a local university provide her the opportunity to get to know her students outside of the classroom, and allow students to showcase their individual talents in a different light to Abigail. Using her content matter is provides another space for Abigail to strengthen relationships with her students. She gives a great example by explaining her use of the book, *Shadow Work: The Unpaid, Unseen Jobs that Fill Your Day*, by Craig Lambert. Abigail states, "My kids had a fit. I was all ready for my students' outrage over how society has changed, and instead they were outraged with me that I would even think that this was a problem...it's things like that, that help me build relationships – getting to know your students opinions and views, and getting them to know mine."

**The successful teacher.** Nothing more strongly reinforced how important building relationships with students are for these teachers, than being asked to narrate about a time they had great success in teaching. None of the four participants focused on subject matter or instruction. As Pat puts it, "You know, even when you asked that question, the people who are coming to mind are not academic successes, it's never

academic.” Abigail states, “I’m not going to pick an academic story.” For all four of these participants, success was about the relationships.

Abigail describes the time that she worked with a student who used sarcasm in her communication with teachers and other students and who had a negative attitude toward learning and the process of school. She states, “Sometimes she would try and derail different people or point them out and ridicule them.” Abigail strived to build a relationship with this student, and in building that relationship modeled behavior that allowed the student to see how her own behavior was influencing those around her. Through the modeling, Abigail was able to get the student to change the behavior, to where the negativity disappeared and the child became more positive in her words and actions. She states, “We’ve managed to turn that around, and she is nothing but positive now, and leaves little post-it notes in various places in my classroom telling me to have a good day.”

For Moana, her willingness to work with the student who has fallen behind in her class is what she considers one of her greatest successes. This happens to be the same student that she sent to the principal’s office in an effort to get him to understand that he was getting in the way of his own learning. When the student gets angry and storms out of the classroom, Moana realizes that she somehow needs to reach this child to get him back on track behaviorally in her classroom, so that he can perform academically. Through patient conversation, student choice, and offering to support the student by working with him as he finished the project, Moana was able to get him to complete the work that needed to be completed. She states, “For me, there has to be some learning from the student’s perspective, so I need to intervene to stop them from the behavior

that's going to block the learning opportunity so that solid learning happens." By showing compassion and giving the student choice, Abigail is able to help the student realize that it is in his best interest to complete the project, and by providing the appropriate scaffolding for the student, she removes the behavior block that is hindering the learning process.

For Pat and Kevin, there is a definite understanding that their greatest successes are not academic successes, but rather those built around relationships that neither knew at the time were all that critical. It was not until years later that students returned to connect with Pat and Kevin that they understood the impact of the relationship that they had built. For Pat, it was young lady she met her second year of teaching. The student has kept in touch over the years, and later explained to Pat how important that relationship was to the student. Pat states, "She would come and see me in my room, and we've always kept in touch, and she has always told me, 'You were the reason I went to college. You're the reason I have a degree in education.'" Pat states that she is not sure what she did that caused the student to react to her, but she does acknowledge that while she had the student in class, she knew that the student was in "need of a mother figure." By building a strong relationship with the student, Pat has the realization that the child felt supported enough to be successful beyond high school.

Kevin, too, has an impactful relationship with a student while the student was in his classroom around eight years ago. His student came to visit Kevin shortly after Kevin was moved back into the classroom by his administration. At the time of the visit, Kevin was feeling particularly dissatisfied with what he was doing, due to his lack of input with the district towards his job. Kevin states that in his conversation with his former student,

the student said, "...he could trace his success back and he said, 'It was because of you.' It's just certain things that make all the world different." The student, dealing with the death of his mother, was in Kevin's regular geometry class. Kevin recognized that with the student's ability and talent, he should be in an accelerated class. Kevin moved the student to the advanced class, and then proceeded to build a relationship with the student throughout the remainder of the year, providing support and scaffolding for the student when it was needed.

Interestingly, both Kevin and Pat express that they have a hard time building the types of relationships that they had several years ago with their students today. Kevin states, "I wish I had the same kind of connections now. Maybe I do, I just need to tap into them more. To say I could really see certain things in certain people, and start pushing them towards that, it's too hard to identify today." Pat echoes that sentiment when describing her attempts to build a relationship with one of her current struggling students. She states, "I would stay and talk with her after school and try to help her, but now she is back to being crabby again, and not talking to me, so I mean, what worked with my former students certainly isn't working with my current student." Both teachers indicate that the environment is to blame for the inability to connect with these students today. For Kevin, he feels that students today have so much "baggage" and it is hard to see what gifts they truly have, "because they're just beaten down all the time." For Pat, it is a time issue. She states, "Sometimes I think the kids just want attention, period. I don't have time to ask her more than once if something is wrong. I just don't. I have too much on my plate."

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to explore the narratives that four teachers tell about their experiences in the classroom. The analyzation of these narrated stories revealed the experiences that teachers have, both within the internal and external context of school, their self-identities and how those self-identities have been disrupted and supported through political, societal and institutional structures, and how that self-identity has influenced teacher/student interaction. Conclusions drawn from data focus on three areas: the context (purpose of school), self-identity influencing generativity, and student interaction (the authenticity of student interaction).

**Context - the purpose of school.** Experiences narrated by these four participants reveal that each participant had his or her own understanding of the purpose of school. These understandings, while all focused on student learning, illuminated an individual understanding that was heavily influenced by self-identity. The contexts, both external and internal, revealed experiences where participants were empowered, and experiences where participants felt skepticism and confusion. The language used by each participant revealed his or her belief about the purpose of the system in which he or she worked.

For Kevin, the context of school revealed a purpose that was for moving students from one point to another. Recall his desire to understand his students' life goals. Kevin, through his questioning techniques, is interested in understanding his students on a level that exceeds the mathematical content that he teaches within the four walls of his classroom. He is determined to help his students understand what is needed to move forward and obtain their goals, and help them realize that it is not just math concepts that have to be learned, but also learning how to learn for life.

For Moana also, the context of school provides a purpose to help students understand how to be learners for life. Moana, while concerned about her content for the here and now, also understands the importance of providing her students with skills that will support them later in life, whether it be college or in the work place. Recall her hesitancy around her students desire to earn points, and her belief that this focus on earning points does not prepare students to "matriculate and move into this world." The context of school for her is to use the context as a way to teach students that sometimes learning has to happen for the sake of learning.

For Pat, the context of school is for providing students the knowledge that is needed to pass the state mandated standardized tests. The stories that she narrates speak to the experiences of teachers who are most successful in this endeavor, and her frustrations with her own teaching come from her inability to be successful in this because of the structure of school. Recall her desire to bring back tracking and ability grouping of students. She wonders how she is to provide meaningful learning experiences for students that will result in successful passage of state mandated tests when student reading levels do not meet grade level expectations. This belief that the context of school



is for passing standardized tests leads to her disagreement with the structure of her particular school district.

For Abigail, the context of school is where she can prove her self-worth to her students. It is a place where she can seek out the rewards and accolades that help to fuel her self-identity of a competitor. The interesting aspect is that this view of the purpose of school is the only one of the four participants' that is not student centered. Recall Abigail's metaphor for the school that she works in, "swimming with the sharks." This metaphor implies that she is in constant competition with the other teachers in her building. She seeks collegial opportunities outside of her building because of the competitiveness in her building.

The ambiguity expressed about the context around the purpose of school narrated by these four participants seems to reflect the same ambiguity that society and politics have around the purpose of school. What is the true purpose of today's public schools? Because of this confusion, as new mandates are created and pushed down on teachers from outside the educational context, teachers are becoming increasingly frustrated about what is expected from the practice of teaching. For Kevin and Moana, clearly the context of school is to prepare students to be lifelong learners. This creates conflict with the top-down management style of current educational structures, most notably illustrated in Kevin's narrative.

**Self-identity: Teacher generativity versus stagnation.** Each participant exhibits unique, multiple identities depending on time and place (Bahktin, 1981), and what was revealed in the context of these narratives is how the participants perceived his or her identity at this particular point in time. As participants moved through their

individual narrative, self-identity may have revealed more complex meaning than the four identities assigned. At the core, though, each one of these participants seemed to reflect a self-identity supported by the stories narrated, which led to either a generative or stagnant status.

Erikson (1950) determined that around the ages of 40-65, adults entered a stage he called generativity versus stagnation. In this stage, adults exhibited characteristics that allowed for the passing on of life knowledge to younger generations. This generativity was exhibited through the adult's need to guide the next generation and commit to others beyond themselves. Stagnation referred to the inability to nurture future generations.

For teachers, generativity is a key component to self-identity. For each of these four participants, all who were within the range of ages for Erikson's generative versus stagnation stage, his or her beliefs about the context and purpose of school, paired with his or her self-identity provides a lens in which to view his or her generativity or stagnation. Fairbanks et al. (2010) outlined four characteristics that determined teacher generativity. These characteristics include the following: current beliefs on the part of the teacher about how the students learn, a strong vision that seeks outcomes for students beyond the curriculum, a sense of belonging within the educational environment, and a resilient identity that is shaped by cultural contexts where teaching is more than technical skill. Teachers who are missing one or more of these characteristics, according to Fairbanks et al., are less inclined to have generative attitudes towards the students that they teach.

For Moana, individual self-identity of the lifelong learner lends itself to the idea of generativity. Her narrated experiences reveal a teacher who seeks to prepare students

for life beyond the four walls of the classroom and ensure that they have the skills and knowledge necessary to be successful in college and beyond. Her aim is not only to prepare her students for the science content that they need to know for Advanced Placement Exams. She also strives to prepare her students for the future challenges and obstacles that they may have to face around daily issues of equity and social justice. She has a strong sense of belonging in her building and in the profession, and will advocate for her students on behalf of those practices she truly feels passionate about. She constantly is striving to improve teaching methodology, and has strong belief that there is always something new to learn.

Kevin's self-identity as a coach also lends itself to the idea of generativity, as does his belief that the context of school is for the purpose of moving students forward. His goal of supporting student movement through the questioning techniques, which allow him to provide support, demonstrates he is more concerned about life goals than math content. His narrated experiences reflect a teacher who is interested in understanding his students motivations and talents so that he can best guide them on their school and career paths. Learning for the sake of learning is important to Kevin and he values curiosity and inquisitiveness. Voice seems to be of great importance to Kevin, both hearing his students' voices, and having his voice as a teacher heard by the school district administration. It is when his opportunity to be heard is silenced that Kevin's self-identity is disrupted and his sense of belonging lessens. His ability to hear student voice lends itself to generativity.

By contrast, Pat and Abigail exhibit fewer traits for generative teachers, and tend to appear more stagnant than generative. Pat's belief in the context of school as preparing

students for state mandated assessments and her self-identity as a history department chair, seems to demonstrate a lack of understanding of what students need to be successful outside of the four walls of the classroom. Her perceived concern about reading abilities influencing thinking abilities could suggest a lack of understanding about alternative ways to approach student learning. Her classification of the two types of students that she teaches, low socio-economic and middle class, and the stereotypes that align with each group, may provide a roadblock to her seeing the possibilities in her students, and seems to provide a justification for when three quarters of her class is predicted to fail. It is suggested through the narrative that at one time, Pat felt it was important to teach students life skills, and she spoke of those teachable moments that she used to have in the “good old days” when she could spend time more on how the content applied to student lives. In her current educational climate, her perception of having to teach specific content using instructional strategies that “teach to the test” suggest a loss of that generative desire to prepare student for future life, and seems to focus strictly on passing the test required for graduation.

Abigail’s focus on her self-identity as a competitor, and her belief in the context of school as being a place for her to compete for gold starts and awards, seems to lend itself more to stagnation than generativity. Her narrated stories reveal an expectation that her students advocate for themselves, yet do not seem to reveal the structures to teach students the skills necessary to become self-advocators. Her sense of belonging within the context of school reveals a very competitive nature, and revolves around her proving her worth to her students and colleagues. One reason for this lack of generative student stories and focus on personal achievement could be attributed to the climate of her

building. Abigail's perception that the teachers she works with are very competitive seems to force her to narrate experiences that focus on her proving her worth, excluding focusing on student growth beyond the four walls of the classroom and the passing on of life knowledge to younger generations.

**Interactions with students: The authentic student experience.** It is very interesting to note that regardless of the experiences narrated about the context of school, and regardless of self-identity and the ability to be a generative teacher, all four participants narrated stories that articulated an authentic student experience based on the teachers' abilities to build relationships with the students that they teach. In fact, when asked to describe a successful experience with a student, the narrated experiences never had to do with the teaching of content; instead, the teachers talked about the building of relationships that demonstrated that the teacher cared about the student.

For Pat and Kevin, the awareness of the impact that they had on the student was not reflected back to them until many years later when the student came back to visit or initiated contact. In the moment of interaction with students, both Kevin and Pat had no idea the impact that was being had on those students' lives. Several years later, they were provided the opportunity to hear directly from the student the positive influence each had on the students' lives. A student coming back to reconnect with a teacher provides a lens for the teacher to see his or her own strengths as a teacher, reinforcing the authenticity to building strong student relationships.

For Moana, the ability to see beyond a student's behavior to uncover learning blocks and address that behavior, appear to make her classroom a place of agency and power (Hanley, 2006). Students are provided with a foundation that allows for the

transmission of knowledge leading to the transformation of students. The idea that her students attend school specifically for her class speaks to her ability to be socially conscious of the struggles her students face and can help remove barriers to learning through relationship building.

For Abigail, building a strong relationship with her students is the key to all classroom discipline, and without that ability on her part she feels her classroom management would suffer. Her strategy of getting to know her students outside of the classroom reinforces her power and agency within the classroom, and helps her to explain to students the real world consequences using real world examples.

The notion that a teacher's affective behavior is just as important as the academics taught (Matsumura, Slater & Crosson, 2008) seems to be highlighted in each of these teachers narratives. The mechanisms and specific strategies that are implemented by these teachers in the classroom provide the agency and power that is needed for the teacher to feel successful about his or her outcomes with students. No matter the type of teacher, self-identity or belief about the educational context, these teachers believe in the power of relationships.

### **Implications for Research and Practice**

Clandinin and Connelly (2013) suggest that there are three justifications for narrative inquiry research: personal justifications, practical justifications, and social justifications. The personal and practical justifications for this research were outlined within the first and third chapters. This section will explore the social justifications of this research. "Social justifications of narrative inquiries can be thought of in two ways: theoretical justification, as well as social action, and policy justifications" (p. 37).

**Theoretical justifications.** Focusing on the methodology of narrative inquiry, this research illuminated the stories of empowerment and stories of skepticism that teachers narrated about the experience of teaching. These stories were critical to understanding the current context in which urban teachers are practicing the craft of teaching. To address any of the issues that arise in the current educational climate, there needs to be a strong understanding of the factors that are influencing the stories of empowerment and skepticism. Applying Dewey's (1938) *Theory of Experience* in constructing the participants' narratives helped in understanding the factors from past experience that are influencing current experience and potentially influencing future experience.

Using the approach of "storying the story" (McCormack, 2009) provided the analytical lenses in which to thoroughly consider participant's narratives to create rich, thick description of teacher experience. The narrative lens provided an opportunity to explore the descriptive aspects of the story while the language lens allowed for the exploration of language usage, so critical in a narrative inquiry. The context and moment lenses provided the opportunity to analyze the structural forces that were disrupting and supporting self-identity, which in turn impacted the teacher /student interaction. These four lenses together create an ideal methodology for uncovering and understanding the stories that teachers narrate about their experiences.

**Social action and policy justifications.** This research illuminates the structural and political forces that are pushing down on teachers and are influencing the experiences they are having in the classroom. The political context and the push by federal and state governments for the privatization of education indicate the extreme dissatisfaction with

urban education. Not being asked to participate in the dialogue to determine strategies and practices to improve teaching and learning in urban environments diminishes teacher agency and results in feelings of exclusion. Teachers distinctly feel pressure to implement mandates for which they have great skepticism and no trust in as being beneficial to what they do in the classroom.

Social action needs to be taken to ensure that teachers are afforded the opportunities to be a part of the conversation about what happens in urban schools. Without this critical involvement from these major stakeholders in the educational process, any broad sweeping policy implementations will be met with resistance. The exclusion of teachers from the conversation also leads to feelings of disempowerment and disengagement with the work that urban teachers perform as narrated by these participants. As Kevin stated, “Where’s our input? Even if you have an idea of where it has to go, you should have someone at least feel like they were heard...Make it seem like we have a voice.”

### **Recommendations**

The narratives that these four participants tell are situated in the middle of a continuum. At one end, he or she is asked to account a particular experience situated topically and temporally. At the other end is the creation of the entire life story, woven together using all the individual topical and temporal stories (Riessman, 2008). By weaving these stories together, the self-identity of these four participants is revealed in the particular context of their lives. From this, the researcher is charged with the task of “putting the knowledge in the service of enhancing human experience” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). These recommendations are an attempt to enhance the experience of



veteran teachers in urban public schools and to reframe thinking around educational reform to be more inclusive of the professional judgment of teachers.

**Include teachers in the dialogue.** Recall Moana’s suggesting of why teachers push back against the political structures that are forced down through mandates and laws. She refers to the teacher acceptance of state mandates around benchmarking student progress, using content standards, and testing students using standardized assessment for student growth models as a “battle.” Her idea that these concepts, on their own, are all things that teachers would agree are positives, is a valid assumption. However, when the conversation around these things excluded the key stakeholders, there was tremendous pushback in how the implementation of these ideas is carried out.

Being left out of conversations that directly impact what teachers do in the classroom has left teachers with feelings of disempowerment and frustration. It is human nature to want to be included in the decision-making processes that directly influence the nature of work. By excluding teachers from this conversation, teachers feel the distrust that the public has for what they do in the classroom. This leads to feelings of devaluation by the teacher on behalf of the public that they serve. The idea that they cannot know what is best for the students that they serve in their classrooms has created anger and resentment for many teachers, which leads to this battle mentality.

To alleviate this mistrust, frustration and pushback against mandates, teachers must be included in the conversation. Including teachers in the dialogue ensures that they are part of the process and provides them with the opportunity to feel valued and empowered by the structures that seek change. Leaving teachers out of the discussion of what is and what could be creates a vacuum in what is currently mandated. Many

teachers do know what is best for students and want standardized curricula and authentic ways to evaluate student learning, but until their voices are heard, the battle mentality will continue.

**Make stronger connections.** The stories of empowerment within the classroom itself, allow for a teacher self-identity that can be reinforced within the four walls of the classroom. These teachers narrated stories that reflected a confidence in their abilities to sustain and support student learning and growth within that internal context. These stories were narrated with a tone of confidence by the participants and reflected an understanding that each knew definitively what was best for students. These stories also clearly outlined the idea of building relationships with students in class. All four participants were decisive in knowing how to build those relationships with students and had very specific strategies that supported the belief, and by all accounts narrated, provided teachers with success in building those relationships.

In contrast, the stories of skepticism in the external context, revolving with what happens outside of the four walls of the classroom, reflect a teacher struggle to comprehend how district, state and federal mandates impact teaching and learning in the classroom in a positive way. This was highlighted in the data accountability practices that Pat and Kevin were required to participate in, and in the inauthenticity of the teacher evaluation process all four participants experienced. It seemed a lot of time was spent on looking for and trying to figure out what administration, state and federal entities were expecting. Skeptical belief on the part of the participants on whether what was being required was really something that was good for students in the classroom and instruction became the tone of the narrative. It is these narratives that cause teachers to create the

“secret stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) of what is actually happening in the classroom, whether it matches the district’s “sacred story” or not.

To counterbalance these stories of skepticism, federal, state and local entities need to help teachers draw a clearer connection between what is being required and what it means for classroom instruction. Finding practical applications for the practices required and helping teachers understand the connection will help reduce the need for teachers to create secret stories and will better help align what is happening in classrooms with the district’s sacred story. This will help teachers have the confidence in the district that is lacking in these narratives as to what is best for the students sitting in their classrooms.

**Make teacher evaluation authentic.** All four of these participants narrated experiences around teacher evaluation that revealed an extreme distrust and lack of belief in the teacher evaluation systems used in their districts. Beliefs about the inauthenticity of teacher performance, using evaluation as a punitive measure to eliminate those teachers deemed ineffective, and skepticism around the value of what is actually being evaluated causes pushback on the validity and reliability of teacher evaluation systems.

There is a perception that self-identity is interrupted when teachers feel stress around the evaluation system. Moana explains, “It’s extremely stressful for teachers who aren’t strong enough to professional develop themselves, or don’t have the inherent motivation themselves of what to do. And so they constantly fall into the victim role.” The stress of teacher evaluation interrupting teacher self-identity creates this default position for teachers where they feel as if they have become persecuted. For Moana, she believes that once the teacher is in this “victim role,” his behavior suggests that he does not like working with students.

Local, state and federal education agencies, as well as teachers themselves, need to revise current teacher evaluation practices and begin promoting the idea of teacher evaluation for improvement of classroom practices, rather than continuing on with the idea of teacher evaluation for punitive measures. This shift needs to happen at all levels of the educational system, including at the teacher level.

Recall Pat's story about being asked to observe teacher lessons in her department for rigor. Pat perceived that she was being asked to *evaluate* the teachers in her department, which she immediately pushed back against. In Pat's mind this was in direct contradiction of the union contract, peers cannot evaluate one another. But what if Pat misinterpreted what was being said? It never occurred to her that she could begin the conversation, colleague to colleague, around the use of rigor in teaching. She perceived that she was to act in a punitive manner towards her colleagues. Was there something in her current context that caused her to seem to misinterpret the task required?

This idea of peer to peer conversation, as well as administration to teacher conversation is lacking in current dialogues around teacher effectiveness at this most basic level. The stress of these evaluation measures that is causing teachers to "perform" for evaluation need to be alleviated to improve the practice of teaching and learning. Co-teaching, reciprocal teaching, coaching and mentoring is just as beneficial for experienced teachers as it is for new teachers, and all are strategies that could be used to support teacher evaluation for improvement. The perception of teacher evaluation needs to shift for both teachers and administration as to its purpose; provide authentic teacher evaluation practices that encourage necessary professional development to improve classroom instruction and student interaction.

**Provide multiple and varied professional development programs.** Stemming out of teacher evaluation is the need for professional development that is real world, relevant and timely. Teacher views around professional development come from two key concepts. First is the idea that the practice of teaching is constantly changing, and that professional development can help in supporting what teachers do in the classroom to keep up with the changes. As Moana demonstrates, this teacher is always searching for ways to improve her practice of teaching that connect in more engaging ways with her students. Second is the idea that professional development is an imposition. Pat demonstrates this when she is asked to participate in professional development that would help her better evaluate the forms that teacher teams fill out around data assessment practices. Because she has extreme skepticism in the process, she perceives professional development on that as an imposition on her time.

Districts need to understand the attitudes and beliefs of its teachers, and provide meaningful, structured staff development that supports what teachers do in the classroom on a daily basis. The teacher needs to be able to connect the purpose of the staff development to practices that they deem as valid and supportive in the classroom to alleviate the skepticism that much of current staff development fosters in teachers. Without this connection, staff development provided by the district will continue to be perceived as an imposition.

Finally, districts need to create professional development structures that support teacher evaluation. Creating these structures will result in several positive effects. First, meaningful professional development that responds to areas of refinement in teacher evaluation would lend authenticity to the entire teacher evaluation process itself. Second,

providing meaningful feedback to areas of teacher weakness, supported by professional development that scaffolds appropriate strategies for improvement will provide teachers with real world methods to implement in his or her classroom. Third, tying professional development to teacher evaluation promotes lifelong learning in teachers by not only recognizing areas needed for improvement, but also demonstrating a long term investment in the teachers as employees of the district.

**Write a new narrative.** Finally, teachers and administrators must come together to change the narrative about urban public education. As stated previously, the particular temporal context of the American political system at the time of these interviews had the potential to greatly influence responses to the questions asked during the interview process. The narrative that was expressed by these four participants was riddled with negative connotations for the current educational climate. The dichotomy of teacher as villain versus teacher as hero needs to be challenged, as teachers are neither of these caricatures. They are ordinary men and women, struggling to educate children in a challenging context.

It was mentioned previously that teachers needed to be included in the dialogue about what is happening currently in education. Not only should they be included, teachers should be *demanding* to be included in that dialogue. It is through this dialogue that the narrative can be rewritten. As Clandinin and Connelly suggest (2013) it is not enough to change the narrative, as this accepts aspects of the current narrative to be true. Teachers and administrators must write an entirely *new* narrative that honestly addresses the issues and hopes for solutions to the problems facing urban education today.

## **Moving Forward**

The recommendations in the previous section are part of the social action that needs to be enacted to help teachers feel a part of the educational process. The data collected in this narrative inquiry were not intended to be applicable to all urban teachers, nor was it to solve any specific problems. The goal of this research was to explore new insights and gather new information in understanding urban teachers in all its complexity. It hopefully adds to the larger conversation in the search for designing solutions to help experienced teachers feel self-identity support, which in turn will support their interactions with students.

**Limitations of the research.** This research had a definite geographical limitation. All of these participants worked in districts within a Midwestern urban district and the surrounding area. The state mandates and political forces influencing these teachers were the same, and followed a conservative leaning in the political views of the state. This limited the narratives to the experiences of these teachers in this conservative state, and could not add to the national conversation about what is happening to urban teachers in other urban centers, in both liberal and conservative states across the country. The interpretation and understanding of these stories can add to the conversation at the local and state level, but would play a much smaller role in the national conversation.

Another limitation to this research was the fact that two of the participants were from the same school. This school, while within an urban city, was designed as a school specializing with a high level of partner support and having a consistently strong reputation for academic rigor. The student population attending this were students living in urban environments and from lower socio-economic brackets, however, the school had

an application process for acceptance into the school. The 100% graduation rate, as well as the 100% college attendance rate post-graduation is atypical of most urban high schools. Both participants narrated that their students reflected shared experiences of the urban environment behaviorally, emotionally, and socially.

As a novice researcher, my experience became a limitation to this research. Upon reviewing completed interviews I often wished that I had probed deeper into certain questions to further my understanding of what the participant was expressing. There were moments where the stress of interviewing someone I had just met, especially with the first interview of the first participant, created awkwardness between the participant and myself. I struggled at times determining how deeply to probe and tended to accept short answers that really did not explain what I needed to know to gain deep understanding into self-identity. To prepare I had interviewed several colleagues in a pilot project, but there was a distinct difference in the feeling of interviewing someone well known and who I worked with on a daily basis and a complete stranger.

**Future research possibilities.** There are two key areas where this research could be expanded to help add to the conversations at local, state and federal levels for teachers. First is an extension of the methodology used to determine self-identity and second is the further understanding of the contexts influenced by the discontinuities and supports for teacher work trajectory and self-identity.

An extension of this research would provide for a deeper understanding of teacher self-identity. Classroom observations would add evidence to the self-identity determined for the participant. Did the teacher put into practice what was narrated around self-identity? How did the teacher-narrated self-identity really influence student interaction?



Was there a disconnect in how teachers narrated the teacher/student interaction, versus what was observed? Because narrated experience is influenced temporally and contextually, observation would provide greater insight for the researcher as to what is actually happening in the classroom and how that observation relates to the participant's narrated perceptions of interactions in the classroom.

The context of the experiences that teachers narrate needs to be examined and explored further. A deeper understanding of how the stories of skepticism and stories of empowerment develop within teacher experience can help the dialogue around the best ways to support teachers. Is there a pattern to stories of skepticism? What do those patterns reveal about the nature of teacher self-identity? Deepening the understanding of the context will help entities begin to include teachers more in the conversations about policies that influence teacher practice.

Finally, extending this research to include administrators would significantly add to the conversation around the disconnect that was expressed by these participants with administration. Understanding the self-identity of administrators, how that self-identity is disrupted and supported, and how that self-identity influences administrator interaction with teachers, would illuminate misconceptions between the two stakeholders. Teachers and administration could find supports to collaboratively address state and federal structures that are disrupting the self-identity of these stakeholders.

### **Final Thoughts**

The purpose of this research was to look at the experiences that teachers narrated about classroom practice, how those experiences created self-identity within the profession, and how that self-identity influenced student interaction. Using a qualitative,

narrative inquiry approach, four high school, core subject area teachers with 18 years or more experience were interviewed, and the data was analyzed to determine the moral sources (Coldron & Smith, 1999) and epistemological traditions (Fairbanks et al., 2010).

The narrative inquiry landscape provided a theoretical framework based on Dewey's (1938) principles of continuity and interaction of experience. The experiences that these four participants narrated were about past experiences that influenced present experiences, which will in turn influence future experiences. In addition, current structures have influenced how teachers perceived the past within the ontology of experience. When applied to determination of self-identity, these experiences narrated reveal the disjunctions and discontinuities that interrupt self-identity, revealing an interruption in the teacher work trajectory (Mishler, 1999). The conclusions drawn here focus on three revelations from the narrated processes centered on the three research questions: the context (purpose of school), self-identity (teacher generativity) and student interaction (the authenticity of student experience). These findings have implications for the continuing dialogue happening at the local, state, and federal levels around teacher evaluation and quality professional development to support teachers in the latter half of their careers. Providing teachers the opportunity to participate in these conversations allows for greater teacher agency and a stronger sense of empowerment in both the internal and external contexts.

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## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A

### Participant Recruitment Letter



Cleveland State University

Dear Teacher:

My name is Hannah Reid and I am a student in the Urban Education Ph.D. program at Cleveland State University. I am currently working on a research project that explores the stories of veteran teachers, those with 18 years or more experience, with the intent to create personal teacher narratives around self-identity and teacher/student interactions. I am asking you to participate in a project that roughly will take four hours of your time.

During the interview, we will meet at a public library near you, and I will conduct the first of two interviews. It will occur for approximately 1 ½ hours. I will facilitate the interview and will record the interview by audiotape. Several weeks later at a predetermined time, I will request a second interview, again lasting approximately 1 ½ hours at the same local library where we met the for the first interview. Finally, a third interview will be conducted after I have written your personal teacher narrative to receive feedback from you about what was written and assure accuracy of the narrative.

The interviews will be given a code number and will be transcribed. Only Dr. Anne Galletta, a professor at Cleveland State University in the College of Education and Human Services, and I will have access to the coded transcripts. Excerpts from the interview will be included in a paper for the research project. Your name will not be

attached to the interview or transcripts nor will you or the school you work in be referenced by name within the research project. During this research project, I can protect your confidentiality by keeping all audio taped interviews and transcripts in a secured location and using pseudonyms to represent your name, school building and school district names. While I can guarantee confidentiality, I cannot guarantee anonymity.

There are no risks associated with the interview beyond those of everyday living. Your participation in the interview is completely voluntary, and you are free to stop at any time or to decline to answer any question. The audio recorder may be turned off at any time during the interview process, at your request. Please fill out the attached questionnaire and return to \_\_\_\_\_ (name of principal) in the attached envelope, by \_\_\_\_\_ (date).

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact me at 216.272.5786 or via email at [h.reid@csuohio.edu](mailto:h.reid@csuohio.edu).

Sincerely,

Hannah Reid

Ph.D. Candidate, Cleveland State University

## APPENDIX B

### Potential Participant Questionnaire

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I am willing to participate in the study being conducted by Hannah Reid.

\_\_\_\_\_ No, I am not willing to participate in the study being conducted by Hannah Reid.  
(Checking this line means you do not need to complete any other areas of this paper.)

How many years have you been teaching? \_\_\_\_\_

What grade level(s) are you currently teaching? (Check all that apply for your current teaching assignment)

\_\_\_\_\_ Early Childhood (Grades K-2)

\_\_\_\_\_ Upper Elementary (Grades 3-5)

\_\_\_\_\_ Middle School (Grades 6-8)

\_\_\_\_\_ High School (Grades 9-12)

#### ***Contact Information:***

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I would prefer to be contacted via : \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email

The best time to contact me would be:

\_\_\_\_\_ No Preference \_\_\_\_\_ Morning \_\_\_\_\_ Afternoon \_\_\_\_\_ Evening

*Please contact Hannah Reid at 216-272-5786 or [h.reid@csuohio.edu](mailto:h.reid@csuohio.edu) with any questions or concerns.*

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Research Question Guide – Interview #1**

- Could you talk about your decision to become a teacher? Who or what influenced you in your decision to become a teacher?
- How do you feel about the educational climate today? (Identity in the profession)
- When you first entered the profession, what were the challenges that you faced? How did you cope with those challenges? Have those challenges changed or are they still prevalent today? What are the challenges you face in the classroom today? (Identity in the profession)
- If you had to pick a metaphor for your first year of teaching, what would that metaphor be? Does the same metaphor apply today, or has it changed?
- When you entered the profession your first year of teaching, what was the educational climate at the time? Do you think the climate has changed from your first years of teaching?
- What would your ideal classroom look like? (Vision)
- Is there some type of guiding philosophy that guides your teaching? What help you know how to react in uncertain situations when you aren't sure what to do? (Personal Practice Theories)
  - How do you know the best way to reach all students?
- How does interaction with colleagues impact your vision and your guiding theories? (Belonging)
  - If the answer is it doesn't, ask do you feel like you belong in your school?
  - If it does, how does the interaction with colleagues reinforce your beliefs and thoughts about belonging?
- How do federal and state mandates influence what you are doing? Do you find these mandates helpful or a hindrance?



## APPENDIX D

### Researcher Artifact Sample



The picture to me represents things that get in my way of my success. My photo is called the direction ball. The picture is of a red ball with yellow arrows that are pointing north, south, east, and west. The red ball represents me and the yellow arrows are knowing which direction to go. They are unknown options on where to go in life. The blue and black part of the picture represents the world. The blue part of the picture signifies the sky and the black part represents nighttime: basically, a good and bad world. The red ball reflects my feeling on the world and it represents anger about not knowing which direction to go. The corner with red in the upper left represents the love in the world and that might be the direction I want to go in. Only time will tell which arrow I choose.

-Henry, *Through Students' Eyes* Participant, 2010

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Research Question Guide – Interview #2**

- What artifact have you chosen to represent you as a teacher?
  - Would you describe it to me? How long have you had it?
  - Why is it significant? What does it mean to you?
  - How does it represent what you do in the classroom?
- What in your personal background influences your teaching and interaction with students today?
  - Is this different from what you did in the first years of your teaching experience?
- Who is the student sitting in your classroom today? Describe him/her.
- What does he/she think?
- What are some of the influences on the level of motivation of your students?
- In what ways do you connect with your students? How do you foster or develop a connection with your students?
  - How do you build a relationship with your students?
- Describe a time when you had great success with a student. What made it successful? What did the student do? What were you doing?
- Describe a time when you struggled as a teacher. What happened? What were you doing? What were the students doing? Was there a context or outside factor that was causing the struggle you were having?

## **APPENDIX F**

### **Research Question Guide for Personal Experience Narrative**

- What were your general impressions of the narrative?
- Did you feel as if your stories were accurately portrayed within the narrative?
- Is there anything in the write-up that you are uncomfortable with?